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VOL. IV.

RÉVILLE'S LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

Its Origin, Nature, and Mission

BY

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Translator's Preface

M. Jean Réville, Professor in the Protestant Theological Faculty of the University of Paris, and editor of the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, delivered the following lectures in Switzerland during the autumn of last year. They have already been translated into the Dutch language, and will shortly appear in German. They are now offered to the English public, at this time of growing unsettlement and anxiety, to show how a leading French Protestant endeavours to meet the needs and solve some of the difficulties of those who, in face of the ever-widening horizon of knowledge and consequent broadening of thought, are casting about for a reverent reconsideration and clear restatement of Christian doctrine in the light of the philosophic and scientific conceptions and tendencies of our time.

The translator, although in sympathy with the admirable method and spirit in which the subject is treated, desires it to be understood that he is in no wise pledged either to the general position or to any particular statements contained in the present work. He would merely say with Seneca:

> Soleo et in aliena castra transire, non tanquam transfuga sed tanquam explorator.

VICTOR LEULIETTE.

Preface

"WHAT is Liberal Protestantism? Where could an account of Liberal Protestantism be found, sufficiently clear and free from theological and ecclesiastical controversies, to be within the grasp of readers who are not professional theologians, and who are, further, unacquainted with Protestant controversies?"

Such or similar questions have often been put to me from different quarters, both by men of Catholic and of Protestant training, who were simply desirous to learn or anxious to gain light on religious questions for which they no longer found satisfactory solutions in the traditional catechisms, but the paramount importance of which, for social life and their own spiritual welfare, they could not fail to recognise.

Needs such as these I wish to meet in the

present little book. The few works in which this subject has been dealt with in French are now for the most part out of date, and bear the stamp of controversies within the Protestant Churches. My wish, in the following pages, is not to engage in any controversy, nor, indeed, to speak as a party man or a preacher, but rather as a teacher of religious science intent on instructing his readers and on furnishing them with the materials which will enable them to form their own personal opinions. I am certainly far from pretending to conceal the fact that I am in full sympathy with Liberal Protestantism and that I set out upon this study as a free believer. But I hope that an already long experience in the teaching of history has now so far fitted me to describe with impartiality the beliefs and doctrines of every religion and creed, as to enable me to draw a disinterested and faithful picture of a religious conception which I have made my own.

The discussion of traditional religious ideas in different passages of this book is not

prompted by a desire to confound an adversary. Had my wish been to write a controversial work, I should have given a far greater prominence to their discussion, and I should have experienced but slight difficulty in far more thoroughly refuting orthodox tradition. My sole object, however, has been to show how and for what reasons Liberal Protestants have been led to reject certain traditional doctrines and have come to profess the Christianity which I am here describing.

The successive chapters of this little book were delivered before a large and most attentive audience, in a series of five lectures which I gave in Geneva, during the present month of November, at the request and under the auspices of the Geneva Section of the *Union suisse du Christianisme libéral.* I alone, however, am responsible for the following pages; my worthy friends, who are the representatives of Liberal Protestantism in Geneva, simply urged me to publish them. I hope whoever may chance to read these lectures will

welcome them as kindly as did those who listened to them—that is, will read them with the same earnestness and the same thoughtful and unbiassed attention which are the characteristics of that admirable Genevan audience. A large number of those who were present did not hold the tenets of the *Union*, but they wished to have a complete statement of the essential positions taken up by Liberal Protestantism, in order that they might form a correct estimate of its value, and also, as thoughtful men, make up their own minds as to its claims. Such audiences are only to be found in cities where, for centuries, the public mind has been trained in the school of free enquiry.

I chose *Liberal Protestantism* as the French title of this volume, because the conception of religion and Christianity which is here set forth arose within the pale of Protestantism, where alone it took shape in regularly-organised religious communities. But what I say touching Liberal "Protestantism" applies

equally to every similar conception outside the Protestant Churches; so I can as well entitle the book *Liberal Christianity.*

I do not claim to teach anything new to those who are already familiar with the discussions which have been raised among Protestants by the religious problems of the present time. Still less do I presume to have renewed Liberal Protestantism. My sole aim has been to collect into a co-ordinate whole its essential principles and conceptions on the points which are of the greatest importance for the religious and moral life of present-day society. Above all, I have tried throughout to show the reasons for which Liberal Protestantism has been led to its present conclusions and the evolution through which it has passed. The best way to account for any historical phenomenon is to trace out its growth. I have not attempted to exhaust all the items of the Liberal Protestant programme; I deemed it enough to give a general sketch, dwelling at greater length only on the more salient features.

I have considered it a duty to speak with the utmost frankness, without yielding to any considerations of expediency. Where is absolute sincerity a more sacred duty than in matters pertaining to the religious and moral life? Long experience in the use of the scientific method in historical studies renders such sincerity easy, because it accustoms us to conform our judgment to facts duly observed, instead of attempting to adapt the facts to our personal preferences, or to conceal them under pretence of sparing received opinions. In the religious domain, as indeed everywhere, critical observation of the phenomena of the spiritual life and experience are the indispensable conditions of a sound method.

PARIS, *15th November* 1902.

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Liberal Christianity

Its Origin, Nature, and Mission

I

GENESIS OF LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM

IT IS THE MODERN EXPRESSION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE REFORMATION

Liberal Protestantism essentially individualistic.

LIBERAL Protestantism is not a closed religious system, strictly defined in a confession of faith or in an official catechism; it is essentially a personal matter. It is a general conception of religion, particularly of the Christian religion, under the shelter of which a great number of different doctrines may flourish. This is precisely the reason why it is so difficult to give a specific description of Liberal Protestantism, that is to say, to show plainly wherein lies

its unity, often hidden from the eyes of the superficial observer beneath its many varieties.

Its varieties do not exclude its moral unity.

Not so long ago such a statement would have sufficed to discredit Liberal Protestantism at the very outset. The value of a religion was said to be gauged by the unchangeable character of its ordinances and doctrines. To show the variations of Protestantism was then, even for great intellects, tantamount to condemning it irrevocably. A deeper knowledge of the history and a scientific study of modern religions have completely dispelled such an error. No one now, at least no well-instructed person, would write Bossuet's *Histoire des Variations.* For, on the one hand, modern history has shown in a striking manner that the most flourishing and fruitful religions are precisely those which exhibit the greatest number of specific varieties within the unity of their essential principles; on the other hand, the history of the past has taught us that every religion presents variations, clearly

marked in proportion to the activity of the religion itself. Even those religions which have most narrowly bound themselves down to the letter of a religious text, or to the decrees of dogmatic authority, succeed, by their varieties of interpretation and of commentaries, in escaping from the dead level of an immutable uniformity.[1] Wherever there is life there is movement, change, organic evolution. Only the dead religions have become for ever petrified in unchangeable forms.

Thus Liberal Protestantism does not attempt to conceal its varieties; on the contrary, it is inclined to see in them a proof of its vitality. But it claims to be more than a congeries of purely individual religious convictions or practices, for it embraces a cer-

[1] All who make a close study of the Catholic Church of the present day know what rivalry among men and what strife of principles lie hidden behind the imposing show of her apparent unity. The latest dogma in the Roman Church has not had half a century of official existence. And yet how many contrary interpretations have arisen out of this very dogma, which more than any other seemed destined to secure the absolute unity of the Church!

tain number of essential principles which are common to all its adherents, and to which their individual varieties attach themselves. These are the principles which constitute its moral unity and which distinguish it from the other religious systems of our time.

Moral and anti-authoritative character.

The first of these principles, and one which may rightly be considered fundamental, is that religion does not consist in an acceptance of a body of metaphysical doctrines or dogmas, but in a religious attitude of the soul, manifested in a corresponding moral life. Hence, in fact, proceed its broad intellectual tolerance and its willingness to welcome different individual opinions. Liberal Protestantism is, first of all, Protestantism opposed to authority, to intellectual servitude in any shape, and to obligatory creeds. For, once grant that what regenerates man and, by rescuing him from spiritual death or preserving him from evil, saves him, is neither acceptance of certain theological doctrines, such as the Trinity, or

Predestination, nor the practice of certain rites or sacraments, such as the Mass or Confession, and it becomes evident that there is no longer any reason for imposing these doctrines and other similar ones or making it obligatory to partake of such sacraments. What is needed is to develop in oneself and to spread abroad those principles of religious and moral life which illumine, raise, and strengthen the mind and the will. But moral consent and acceptance of religious faith cannot be obtained by force; they require free persuasion, instruction, spiritual propagandism and the hallowed contagion of the true and the good.

Liberal Protestantism is thus, as its name implies, a religion of spiritual freedom. It arose and has grown with liberalism and tolerance, those exquisite flowers of high mental culture, the noble efflorescence of the human soul, the harbingers of spiritual progress wherever they flourish. If, however, liberalism forbids any coercion in the mental sphere, it does not follow that a liberal is so far indiffer-

ent that, for him, all doctrines are equally good. He has preferences; he subscribes to some and rejects others. He believes in the salutary influence of what he looks upon as the truth and in the baleful consequences of error. Although he does not arrogate to himself the right to impose truth or to persecute error, it is his bounden duty to propagate the one and to combat the other by lawful means.

Difference between Liberal Protestantism and Protestant Liberalism.

Liberal Protestantism is not merely *Protestant Liberalism.* A moderately orthodox [1] believer may practise liberalism; he will not

[1] A strictly orthodox believer cannot be liberal without inconsistency. For orthodoxy in every church proclaims itself to be that divine truth which alone is able to ensure salvation. It is impossible to hold such a doctrine and yet to admit the lawfulness of various doctrines within the religious society. The expression (moderately orthodox) is contradictory; a man cannot, on his own authority, make a choice in the body of revealed truths without substituting his own personal authority for that of divine truth. By such a term I mean those who naïvely look upon themselves as orthodox, without accepting dogma in its entirety, and who, in spite of themselves, come under the influence of liberal ideas.

thereby become a Liberal Protestant. Use has given to this appellation a more definite meaning. What in French-speaking countries is termed *Liberal Protestantism*, what is named elsewhere *Broad*, *Modern*, or *Progressive Protestantism*, is not only liberalism in the matter of dogma or of doctrine, it is also a body of convictions, differing from the traditional doctrines of the Protestant Churches, but none the less looked upon by their adherents as the expression, at once more faithful and better suited to the present times, of the primitive spirit both of the Reformation and of the Gospel. The chief characteristic of Liberal Protestants is that they are independent of the authority of tradition in their respective Churches, claiming, nevertheless, to remain faithful to the fundamental principles of the Reformation and of the Christian religion as taught by Jesus Christ, not, indeed, by reproducing these principles in a servile manner and in the historical garb they wore at their first appearance, but by developing and

perpetuating them in accordance with the needs of the present evolution of society and civilisation. This is precisely what we have now to elucidate; our contention can only be rightly understood in the light of history. The historical genesis of Liberal Protestantism will help us to understand its *raison d'être*, and to recognise in it the natural and logical outcome of the evolution of Christianity in modern times.

The existence of Liberal Protestantism justified by its historical genesis.

Modern Liberal Protestantism arose out of traditional Protestantism, by virtue of the same causes which, in the sixteenth century, made the Reformation proceed out of the Catholic Church. It is not, as ill-informed judges are sometimes pleased to proclaim, the result of caprice, of the imagination of individuals, or the negations of a few theologians eager for change.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was the product of the Renaissance. When once the Renaissance had made known the

original texts of the oldest Christian writings, and, above all, had introduced new and better methods of reading and interpreting them, the contrast between the teaching and the institutions of the Catholic Church on the one hand, and the teaching and narratives of the Bible on the other, called forth the righteous indignation of those who were both learned and pious. It was in the name of the Bible and primitive Christian truth at last recovered in documents worthy of credit, that they also took up the work of reform, vainly called for during two centuries by the best and most pious theologians and churchmen. To the authority of the Church, the guardian of venerable tradition, they opposed the authority of the Bible, which became henceforward the basis of Protestantism.

The Bible, an historical authority at the Reformation.

When we thus go back to the beginnings of the Reformation, we find that the Bible was for the Reformers, first and foremost an *historical authority.* The Church of the

sixteenth century, as voiced by its Bishops, Popes and Councils, claimed to have faithfully preserved Christian truth and the means of grace granted by God in Jesus Christ to sinful humanity. The Reformers answered: "The oldest and most authentic documents which have preserved the teaching of Christ and the Apostles bear witness to the falsity of such a claim. Christian truth and the means of grace are there seen to be quite other than in the Catholic Church. Elementary good sense bids us trust the direct and immediate teaching of Christ and His Apostles rather than that of the Church, separated from its Founder by fifteen centuries. The tradition it embodies is now nothing short of a terrible perversion of true Christianity."

What was new and epoch-marking in this thesis? Not the fact of looking upon the Bible as the depository of divine revelation, the sacred book in which the Christian truths are to be found; the Catholic Church did not deny that. The main position of the Reformers,

what ultimately led them to revolt against the Church, was simply this: the witness of the Bible is of more value than the voice of tradition, as heard in the Church, to teach us what manner of salvation Jesus Christ brought to men; in other words, the historical authority of the Bible is superior to that of tradition.

It becomes an infallible authority.

By the force of circumstances Protestants were soon led to carry to its extreme consequences this principle of the authority of the Scriptures. The first Reformers had exercised a certain freedom of judgment in their interpretation of the Bible; they made a distinction between the human elements, coming from the authors who drew up the different parts, and the divine substance of revelation itself. Luther used to say: "The word must be believed for its own sake, not for the sake of the preacher, even were it preached by all the angels," and he himself did not scruple to style the *Epistle of James* "an Epistle of straw." Impelled by Catholic controversialists,

the disciples of the Reformers came at last to drop the distinction. The Bible, in its entirety, became in their eyes "The Word of God," a document divinely inspired from beginning to end, and, therefore, infallible. The Bible was not only the immediate witness of revelation, it now became the actual text of that revelation dictated by God, final, complete, delivered once for all, an infallible authority to be set up against the infallible authority of the Church.

The Reformation really founded on freedom of enquiry and the religious supremacy of the individual conscience.

But, in institutions as in ideas, there is an inner logic more powerful than the simple formal logic of party-men. The more men strove to magnify the authority of the Bible as against Catholic controversialists, the more they brought into light other fundamental principles of the Reformation, which had inspired the pioneers of Protestantism, although they had had no clear understanding of their true nature and immense import:—the principles of the *freedom of enquiry* and of the *religious supremacy of the individual con-*

science. By taking their stand on the Bible in their revolt against Bishops and Popes, they were firmly convinced that they were opposing the authority of God to the authority of men. Yet, by what right had they taken so bold a step? In whose name, by virtue of what principle, had they proclaimed the duty of Christians to break with the accredited representatives of the Christian Church? It was, as stated above, in obedience to the evidence of reason, because their minds, better instructed, could not but recognise that the direct witness of the sacred writings was obviously worthier of credence than the utterances of Popes or Bishops in the sixteenth century as the means of learning the real work and teaching of Jesus Christ. What is Luther's last word, his final argument, when, at the Diet of Worms, he refuses to recant, despite the threats of the Emperor, the Pope's legate and the princes of the Church to compel him? "If you do not convince me by the witness of the Scriptures or by *conclusive arguments,* I cannot and will not in anywise

recant; *for it is a perilous thing to act against one's own conscience.*" What was the final sanction of the authority of Holy Scripture for the first French Calvinists? Was it not "the witness and inner working of the Holy Spirit," that is, the intimate and profound harmony of the individual soul with the truth which commands assent?

Doubtless the Reformers with one accord humiliate man's reason and proclaim the powerlessness of the conscience when abandoned to its own resources. They are intimately persuaded that the force of truth and life which impels them does not proceed from themselves; they recognise in it the grace of God and the spirit of Christ acting through the medium of Holy Scripture brought once more to light. But it is none the less *their* reason and *their* conscience which warrant this action, for the only fact they can point to in proof of the divine nature of the truth they are proclaiming is the cogency with which it commends itself to *their* mind and its holiness

as felt by *their* conscience. In spite of all their assertions to the contrary, they cannot do otherwise than appeal to the reason and conscience of their contemporaries, to freedom of enquiry.

This imperative necessity becomes still more visible when the disciples of the Reformers are arguing with Catholic controversialists. Holy Scripture is their sole authority; it becomes henceforth the one infallible consignment of divine revelation. But Holy Scripture must be interpreted. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek. In order that Christians in the sixteenth century may know what it contains, they must have it translated and explained—a difficulty easily overcome! Translations and commentaries soon abound. But what happens now? Translations and commentaries are not at one. We all know that if, to a class of twenty pupils, the teacher dictates the words of a German or French exercise, no two translations out of the twenty will be exactly alike.

How much more will this be true in the case of the Bible, the text of which is so extensive, complex, and, in many places, uncertain.

The Bible is infallible. Granted; but still we must ascertain what it teaches in order to know what Christians must do and believe. Who shall decide between the different translations and interpretations? Here the Catholic Church regained all her superiority from the standpoint of faith based on authority. The interpretation of the Scriptures, she asserted, must be warranted by the Church; she only is competent, being, as she is, the guardian of tradition, which alone enables us to understand and to complete the sacred text. The Protestants, to be sure, had little difficulty in showing the absurdity of such a claim, and, further, the inadmissibility of the interpretations given by the Church. But how were they to prove the superiority of their own interpretations, and, above all, how were they to choose between the numerous varieties which presented themselves? It is evident that here

again they were forced to appeal to reason in order to solve their difficulties. The only way to establish the merit of a translation or of a commentary is to prove it by philological, grammatical or historical arguments. The Protestants did not neglect this method. Thus, in the last resort, the basis of Christian truth became the knowledge of the translator; this was the only guarantee one could have of possessing a right understanding of divine revelation.

The leading part taken by reason and free enquiry in Protestantism is still further attested by the efforts on the part of Protestants to sum up their beliefs in professions or confessions of faith. In face of the numerous theological and ecclesiastical varieties which had sprung from the Reformation, the political authorities desired to know precisely what were the doctrines held by the leading bodies with which they were conferring; the Churches already formed wished to ascertain under what conditions

they might form an alliance. The question was now no longer simply to translate, but to set forth what was essential in God's revelation. Since the Bible is made up of books varying greatly in origin, since, moreover, it is not a book written by one and the same author, but a collection of works originally independent of each other and emanating from many authors, it contains a great number of incompatible doctrines and ideas. Thus there was here ample matter for disagreement among those who desired to reduce its teaching to a certain number of fundamental articles.

Further, it must be remembered that the first Reformers, so bold in their revolt against the institutions and rites of the Roman Church, had proved extremely conservative in the matter of dogma. Most anxious as they were to show that their opposition to the ecclesiastical authorities, now no longer faithful to their mission, was not the work of heretics, they had clung to the orthodox

dogmas even more ardently than the Catholic Church of their day. In this they were still in bondage to the authority of that very tradition which they were elsewhere so vigorously casting off; having as yet only an inadequate knowledge of the history of dogma, neither they nor their successors ever doubted that the principal dogmas long ago promulgated by the Œcumenical Councils were the faithful expression of the Christian faith, and that consequently they were in harmony with the teaching of the Bible.

When, therefore, the disciples of the Reformers summarized their beliefs in confessions of faith, they introduced into them the principal dogmas of Œcumenical tradition side by side with the specific doctrines of the Reformation, the whole being placed under the ægis of the authority of the Bible. The more enlightened among them were not long in perceiving that a fair number of these dogmas were either foreign or contrary to the teaching of the Bible. They tried to

correct them out of loyalty to the Bible. Dogmatic and Biblical confessions of faith were thus multiplied in the bosom of Protestantism and became the subject of endless controversies intended to establish their respective claims. In all these controversies to what could appeal be made? Once more, to exegesis, dialectics, argumentation, reason. The authority of the confession of faith untimately rested upon reason. And those very theologians who, in theory, most flouted reason were not the least given to make use of it in practice.

The older Rationalism.

The time arrived at last when, thanks to the advance of the philosophic spirit since Descartes, the more enlightened among Protestants came to understand that this same human reason—the limitations of which were continually being pointed out by the help of arguments which reason alone could furnish, and to which, nevertheless, men were ever appealing to justify themselves—was also

one of God's gifts, the faculty which, in His Providence, He had ordained to enlighten men and to enable them to discern truth from error. A first embodiment of Liberal Protestantism came into being in the shape of Rationalism; and the principle of freedom of enquiry, inherent to Protestantism, at last became conscious of its own power.

As yet the notion of the infallibility of the Bible was too deeply rooted in men's minds to disappear at once. The evolution of religious beliefs is always and everywhere a slow process, because these beliefs are concerned with men's most sacred interests. At first Rationalistic Protestants strove to demonstrate that the teaching of the Bible was always in agreement with the requirements of reason. With this end in view most ingenious and, at times, naïve combinations were elaborated. Prodigies of exegesis were wrought in order that all the narratives of the Bible might be made to appear rational. It is easy to smile at them now; it would

be more just to acknowledge the important services rendered by Rationalism in preventing the deplorable divorce of religion and reason. The first and most decisive step had now been taken: the authority of reason, even in the domain of religion, was admitted; all else was to follow of necessity.

Historical evolution unfolds the inherent principles of the Reformation.

New spiritual changes were taking place in our occidental world which were soon to find their counterpart in religious thought. The new astronomy completely overthrows the old ideas about the universe, inherited from antiquity, and which till now had held the field. The rising natural sciences, experimental physics and chemistry, substitute for the ignorance of former days a new conception of nature. Philosophical criticism saps the foundation of the older metaphysics, and on its ruins founds the sovereignty of the autonomous conscience. The revolution overthrows the old social order of things and proclaims the rights of man. Lastly, history,

bringing back to light the civilisations of antiquity, and discovering the non-Christian races, gives birth to a new conception of humanity.

How could the infallibility of the Bible have withstood such onslaughts? The books of the Bible, written in antiquity, reflect the conceptions which were current in that part of the ancient world in which they were composed. For the Bible the earth is the centre of the universe, and heaven a region situated above the earth; possessing no knowledge of the laws of physics and chemistry, the Bible looks upon the realm of nature as miraculous; only a small portion of the world is familiar to it, and of mankind, outside the limited circle of its own horizon, it knows nothing. Thus it comes that the Bible contains countless errors in science, giving us, in the matter of the creation, the composition of the world, and the history of humanity, accounts which are irreconcilable with the best established conclusions of the natural

sciences and with a comprehensive view of history.

When once enlightened Protestants had acknowledged *de jure* the authority of reason as their predecessors had sedulously maintained it *de facto*, the result of such a conflict could not remain doubtful. Just as Luther at Worms had said to the representatives of religious authority: "I will not recant unless you convince me of error, for it is a perilous thing to act against one's own conscience";—so too every consistent Protestant must needs say to those who were bringing forward the teaching of the Bible as an answer to the sure results of the new sciences: I cannot surrender my convictions, unless you convince me by fair arguments that I am in the wrong; I cannot act in opposition to my conscience.

And, indeed, those who among Protestants still hold to the infallibility of the Bible are daily becoming fewer. Does this imply that Protestants have therefore given up the very principle upon which the Reformers had built?

Not in the least. What they have given up is that false and inferred notion of the authority of the Holy Scriptures which the insufficiently informed disciples of the Reformers professed, namely, that the Bible is made up of the literal words of divine revelation, dictated by God, and that it contains no error. They have returned to the original Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture, to its *historical authority*, as legitimate to-day as it was at the beginning of the sixteenth century. To-day, as then, the Protestant justifies his opposition to Roman Catholicism by taking his stand on the Bible, and that because the Bible furnishes us, to-day as then, with the only authoritative record of the teaching and work of the prophets, of Jesus and His first disciples. When we want to know what is really Christian, we refuse, to-day as in the sixteenth century, to subordinate the direct and original testimony of the Biblical writings to the tardy tradition of the Roman Church, represented by her Councils and Popes, and

when the two teachings disagree, we unhesitatingly maintain that preference must be given to the Biblical record. It was not otherwise at the dawn of the Reformation.

But, while thus retaining at its basis the principle of the authority of the Bible, as the historical witness to the sayings and life of Christ, modern Protestantism, enlightened by experience, proclaims without reserve *the authority of reason and conscience in the religious and moral life.*[1] And in this Liberal Protestants are persuaded that they are remaining faithful to the true spirit of Protestantism, seeing that, from the beginning, the Reformers were obliged to appeal to the deep and intimate evidence of truth and to the sovereignty of the conscience as the ultimate justification of their work, and that, at all times, Protestants have been found

[1] It is evident—as the rest of this study will sufficiently prove—that by "the authority of reason and conscience" Liberal Protestantism does not mean the authority of a reason and a conscience untrained and devoid of all education. It obviously refers to our present reason and conscience, the product of centuries of education in the race and of the experience of former generations.

making a loyal use of the weapons of reason to confound their enemies and propagate their own doctrines.

Liberal Protestantism applies the principles of the Reformation with greater consistency.

The wide space which we have just devoted to historical statements enables us to see that we are not departing from Protestant tradition when we assert the authority of reason and conscience in the realm of religion and merely proclaim the historical character of the authority of the Scriptures. Nor, in fact, do the great majority of Protestants in these days act otherwise, not even those of them who imagine they profess doctrines in agreement with the old confessions of faith. There are hardly any among them who do not set aside what in the Bible seems to them contrary to reason or what is condemned by their conscience. Now, as soon as the teaching of a religion is rejected at any single point in the name of reason, the authority of that religion becomes subordinated to the authority of reason.

Its view of the Bible.

In this legitimate and logical evolution of Protestantism, the chief characteristic of contemporary Liberal Protestantism is its greater consistency in applying the principles which we have just elucidated. If, in their dealings with Catholicism or even Protestant dogmatic orthodoxy, Liberal Protestants continue before all else to lay stress upon the historical authority of the Bible, in order to confound the ever-recurring claims of the Roman Church or of catholicising orthodoxy to represent the only genuine Christianity,—in their own religious and moral life they staunchly uphold the sovereign authority of reason and conscience, and this they profess loyally without feeling the need of taking shelter behind concessions to traditional ideas respecting the supernatural inspiration of the Bible.

Of course their attitude towards the Bible is one of deep veneration and real gratitude, but they can no longer look upon it as a book essentially unique and distinct from all the other literary productions of the past. Just

because, in their eyes, the Bible is before all else a historical record, it is, in the full acceptation of the term, a human book, subject, like every other book, to the inexorable conditions of all human works. Passionately desirous to find its true meaning and bearing, they study it with every instrument which modern historical science and historical criticism place at their disposal. And, while they recognise that much is still uncertain or undecided in many of the positions of Biblical criticism, they cannot help accepting those of its conclusions which are well established. The Bible has thus come to be for them a twofold collection of Jewish or Christian books, originally independent of each other, and never meant by their respective writers to be gathered together into a single whole. By the simple fact, these books, going back to very different periods, do not always agree in their teaching or in their statements. A large number of them were re-edited in accordance with the literary habits of antiquity before assuming their final shape in

the Canon as we now have it. The majority are not the work of the authors to whom they are attributed. Frequently it is difficult for us to arrive at their real text and true meaning. For a long time the limits of the Biblical collection were uncertain, some Canons including certain books which others definitely rejected. Almost all the narratives of the Bible come from the pen of writers who did not themselves witness the events which they record, but who, only having received them from a more or less faithful tradition, relate the facts in accordance with their own ideas.

In a word, the books of the Bible were subject to the same vicissitudes as the writings of antiquity in general. Nothing distinguishes them in this respect from the other literary works of ancient times, or rather they were even more subject to change than many other classical works, later in date and less exposed to alterations due to current opinion. How then shall we continue to speak of an inspiration peculiar to the Bible, and the exclusive

privilege of writers raised, by divine intervention, above the natural conditions of their time and environment?

How, on the other hand, can we still claim to invest these books, so different in origin and so dubiously grouped together, with the character of exclusive channels of divine inspiration to the detriment of all the other historical, religious or moral writings of mankind, of those even in which we find the highest teaching, the loftiest aspirations, the noblest transports of the human soul? Assuredly such claims can no longer be made by thoughtful men who have definitely given up the dogma of the magical inspiration and infallible authority of the Holy Scriptures. Modern Liberal Protestantism, guided by the history of religions no less than by historical criticism, has ceased to claim for the writers of the Bible any exclusive and supernatural inspiration, either general or partial. If there are a great many pages in the Bible penetrated by a breath of the very deepest religious and moral

inspiration, this inspiration does not differ in nature from that which, in every age, and in all the societies of the past, has raised thinkers, noble artists, poets, heroes of conscience, or great benefactors of humanity, above the miserable conditions of human mediocrity, and which, in the mystery of its inexplicable origin, is everywhere and at all times the divine agent of the slow ascent of humanity towards a higher life.

Will the Bible, then, be for modern Liberal Protestantism nothing but a historical record, good enough to confound the claims of the Roman Church, adequate, when checked by a discriminating historical criticism, to inform us as to the work and teaching of the prophets and Jesus, but divested of all supernatural attributes and special authority?

Well! even were the Bible nothing else, would not that suffice to ensure for it a position of the very highest importance? For, without it, we should probably not even know that Jesus ever lived, and we should

be wholly unacquainted with His sayings and life.

But, again, there is this further consideration. If, in the eyes of modern Liberal Protestantism, the collection of literary productions which we name the Bible is invested with no supernatural halo and is the result of no magical inspiration marking it off from all other literary works, this entirely human Bible, for the very reason that it is truly and deeply human, stands out as one of the most wonderful and precious of productions, because it preserves the record of the noblest and holiest religious experiences which the human race has handed on to us—those, namely, of the prophets of Israel, and more especially of the greatest of them all, Jesus the Christ. This it is which constitutes the value of the Bible for us. It is through the Bible and in its pages alone that we are reached by those splendid minds, those matchless pleaders for justice, those heroes of indomitable hope and moral fortitude, those souls whose piety was so pure and holy that

the mere fact of our listening to their exhortations and entering into their thoughts suffices to awaken new energies in our spiritual life.

The Bible is not only for us the record of a history which it is all-important that we should know. It is, further, at least in its best and most beautiful pages, a never-failing source of religious and moral education. According to the fine traditional expression it is the book of "edification"—that is to say, of the building up of our moral being: it strengthens and fosters all that is good and healthy in us.

That is why we continue to found our religious education and that of our children upon the Bible, without thereby excluding any other source of moral or religious life. If the Bible has preserved for us noble spiritual experiences, these are not to do away with the religious experiences passed through elsewhere than in Israel or among the first Christians. Wherever a generous thought is to be gleaned, a great and noble example admired, a precept of wisdom or virtue imbibed, a source of healthy

active devotion drawn from, we have at heart to avail ourselves of these benefits, whatever be the race, religion, or philosophy whence they come to us. The only condition required for them to become sources of inspiration to us, is that they be justified by our reason and sanctioned by our conscience; for what is irrational or condemned by our conscience can in nowise be for us an element of religious or moral life. It is not because they are in the Bible that we meditate upon the exhortations of the prophets or the appeals of Christ; we do so because they are supremely beautiful and beneficent. And it is because we find them in the Bible that we turn to it, with the feeling, however, that we are quite free to condemn and reject anything which, in this same Bible, shocks our reason or is repugnant to our conscience.

Liberal Protestants mean to be freethinkers in the full and true acceptation of the term—that is to say, men who think freely, not

Liberal Protestants mean to be free thinkers and free believers.

professed unbelievers. They mean to be free believers—that is to say, men who, in the realm of the moral life and in the vast domain beyond the ken of positive science, found their beliefs on free enquiry and moral experience. They have thus the firm assurance of being the continuators of the Reformation, for the latter was no religious revolution ended once and for all in the sixteenth century, a *terminus ad quem* beyond which it is henceforth forbidden to advance; it was rather the proclamation of a principle which must engender its legitimate consequences, the *terminus a quo* of an evolution, the progress of which must needs be correlated to that of general civilisation. To be a Protestant is not to adhere to the doctrine of Luther, Calvin, or any other founder of the Protestant Churches. It means being inspired by the principles which were the *raison d'être* of their work, independently of their personalities, and which are destined to produce natural fruits in proportion as they become more and more openly displayed, and

as those who hold them become more and more clearly imbued with them.

Fundamental principles of Liberal Protestantism.

The supremacy of reason and conscience in religious matters as in all the other departments of spiritual life, the historical authority of the Bible freely studied with all the resources furnished by science and apart from all sectarian prejudice, such are the fundamental principles of Liberal Protestantism: it will now be our task to enquire into their application.

II

LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM FOUNDED ON RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

IT IS THE MODERN EXPRESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Genuine Christianity is the religion taught and lived by Christ.

TRUE Christianity is the religion of Christ, the religion which Jesus taught and lived, not the one which, later on, His disciples built around His person and work. One feels some reluctance in pressing so elementary a truth; and yet one cannot choose but do so, since it has continually been disregarded by the Churches.

No one would dream of identifying the philosophy of Socrates with that of the Neo-Platonists, although the latter is, in the history of ancient thought, the final embodiment of the spiritual evolution initiated by Socrates. Now, to be a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ; and in order to ascertain in what

measure one is really and faithfully a disciple of Christ, one must know what Christ taught, did, and required of His hearers that they might become His disciples.

History, studied according to the scientific method, has confirmed what common-sense revealed to the men of the Renaissance, and what the Reformation of the sixteenth century established as the foundation of Protestantism: this indispensable acquaintance with the teaching and work of Christ can only be drawn from the oldest written documents which we possess concerning the beginnings of the Christian religion, that is, in the books of the Bible. Such is essentially the Protestant position. Further, this historical witness of the Bible must be studied with all the resources of reason, under penalty of being misunderstood. This also is absolutely in accordance with the spirit of Protestantism. So much we have shown in the preceding pages.

Liberal Protestantism has been loyally animated by these principles. Not only has it,

long since, refused to acknowledge as faithful expressions of Christianity the dogmas of the Catholic Councils, notwithstanding the undoubted historical or even religious value of many of these dogmas, because it deems them irrational and utterly foreign to the original teaching of Christ. Not only has it thrown off the yoke of the Protestant confessions of faith, because a thorough examination of them proved that they too by no means faithfully reflected the teaching of Christ. But further, owing to the immense results reached by the historical and philological sciences during the nineteenth century, it has recognised that in the Bible itself there are many doctrines which come neither from the prophets, nor from Jesus, and which consequently are not to be considered as the faithful expression of the teaching of Christ.

This is a point which clearly differentiates Liberal Protestantism from the other forms

of Protestantism, and which it is therefore important to examine closely. On the one hand, the study of the Old Testament has demonstrated, in a most striking manner, that the grand conception of spiritual and ethical monotheism, that imperishable glory of the Jewish race in the history of humanity, was the work of prophets, of religious, moral, and social reformers, who ceaselessly waged war against the idolatry, superstition, immorality, and national apostasy of their people, and not the achievement of legalists, or of rabbis and doctors, who, on the contrary, attempted, under ritual observances, casuistry, and formalism, to stifle the breath of life called forth by the prophets. On the other hand, the study of the New Testament has shown, no less clearly, that the greater number of books therein contained in nowise directly re-echo the words of Jesus, but only the speculations which arose about the Christ in the minds of men who had never either seen or heard Him. Of course we do not mean to bring forward in

How and in what measure it is possible to know the teaching of Jesus.

this place the latest hypotheses of criticism, destined shortly to be succeeded by others, as though they were well-established truths. We are here referring to facts universally acknowledged by all those who have studied these questions without party bias.

It is certain that it is not in the *Apocalypse* that we find the teaching of Jesus. The *Apocalypse* is the work of an entranced seer, who describes what he has learned when in a state of ecstasy, not what he has heard from Jesus. Nor again is it in the Epistles of the apostle Paul. Paul never saw Jesus, never heard Him; he has learned the little he knows concerning Him from other apostles. Indeed, in the Epistles which have come down to us bearing his name, hardly one or two sayings of Jesus are to be found. However admirable his letters may be, they only contain speculations of the apostle or his disciples regarding Christ, and nothing emanating directly from his Master. We are obliged to confess that the same is true of the author of

the Fourth Gospel. It is a growing belief among critics that this Gospel is not the work of the apostle John, to whom it has been attributed by the Church on a mere hypothesis which nothing justifies. Those even who have faithfully adhered to this traditional error are almost unanimous in agreeing that the apostle John wrote this Gospel in his extreme old age, after he had come strongly under the influence of the Jewish-Greek philosophy of his time. What, then, becomes of the historical accuracy of his statements? Besides, we must make our choice: the teaching of Jesus cannot have been at once what it is said to have been in the First Three or *Synoptic* Gospels, and what it is reputed to have been according to the Fourth Gospel. Jesus cannot have taught at once the ideas of Paul and of John, those of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Apocalypse. They are too dissimilar, at times even contrary, to be the echo of one and the same preaching.

Liberal Protestantism has thus learned to

discriminate between the teaching of Jesus and that of the most illustrious doctors of primitive Christianity, Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, who founded Christian theology upon the person of Christ, but have not handed down to us, and indeed could not have transmitted, the very words of Jesus. The religious and moral greatness of their work is in nowise diminished thereby, but their value, as historical witnesses, is other than had been imagined by the interpreters of yore, less favourably equipped to study the past.

The only books of the New Testament in which we can really find the history and teaching of Jesus are the Three Synoptic Gospels, bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Even these we must study with discrimination, for it is well known that they were not written by immediate disciples of Jesus. Mark and Luke, according to the tradition of the Church herself, were disciples of the apostles Peter and Paul. As for our

Gospel of Matthew, it is universally admitted that, in its present form, it is not the work of the apostle Matthew, but a writing composed with the help of older documents, one only of which perhaps goes back to an apostle. We should, in consequence, be grievously mistaken were we to imagine that in these Gospels we find a complete and ever faithful transcription of the actions and words of Jesus. Their authors confined themselves to putting down in writing what they knew about Jesus, more than half a century after His death, basing their narratives upon the traditions which they had culled either in earlier written documents or from the oral discourses of their predecessors. Everyone knows how easily accounts intrusted to tradition become distorted. It is therefore certain that many errors, inaccuracies, and legends have crept into their narratives. Moreover, such must have been the case, seeing their accounts frequently disagree.

In spite of this fact, by a synoptic comparison of these Three Gospels we may, nevertheless, succeed in reconstructing the essential features of the person of Jesus, of His teaching and work. For here we are dealing with writers who made no conjectures about Jesus, as did Paul and the Fourth Evangelist, but who simply tried to narrate what they knew concerning Him. To be sure, their accounts reflect more or less the tendencies of each; they are more or less conservative, liberal, or emancipated from Jewish traditions. But this is true of most other historians in all ages. The personality of the narrator always colours his mode of depicting men and things. It is enough, in order to convince one's self of this, to read even nowadays the report of the same event in a conservative or radical newspaper. The task of historical criticism precisely consists in bringing out the real facts, from these diversely coloured reports, of which they are the varying pictures.

It is therefore wholly erroneous to say that we can know nothing of Jesus and His teaching. The truth is that we do not now possess, and indeed can never reach, an exact and absolutely accurate knowledge of the details of the public life of Christ nor of the actual words which He uttered: the fact alone that Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and that His sayings have only reached us through Greek translations, might suffice to convince us of this. Let us, then, beware lest we handle the Gospel message as though we were dealing with a shorthand account of the preaching of Jesus, or with notes coming to us from His immediate hearers. Our Gospels contain many words which Jesus never uttered, and many narratives which are pure legends. Let us not complain, for this it is which lends its power to the Gospel. Had Jesus committed His teaching to a catechism, or summed up His preaching in a series of precepts, as in a code, the letter would very soon have killed the spirit, and while possessing the outward

form of His message, we should have lost its inner substance.

Now this inner substance of the Gospel, the spirit of Christ—that is to say, the guiding principles, the living forces of the Gospel—we do actually possess and clearly discern in the record of the Synoptic Gospels. Nay more, we discern them all the better for our having come to see what uncertainty surrounds the actual letter of the documents. That is why Liberal Protestantism has cast off the yoke of literalism, refusing to look upon the words of Christ as oracles or to apply them like the articles of a code. That is also why it condemns the view of Christianity according to which our religion requires us to accept this or that event narrated in the Gospels, such as the Virgin-Birth, related in two quite different ways, the miracles of Jesus which offer no guarantee of authenticity, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the accounts of which are contradictory even in the Gospels, since the risen Christ appears now in Galilee, now

on the contrary at Jerusalem. On all these points nothing certain can be known, whereas the true substance of the teaching of Jesus transpires with striking clearness from a comparison of the Gospels.

The older liberalism, Rationalistic Protestantism, convinced, as we saw above, that the teaching of the Bible must ever necessarily be rational, had attempted to show that all the Gospel narratives could be explained conformably to reason. The undertaking was a hopeless one, and doomed to failure. The Liberal Protestants of succeeding generations, enlightened by Biblical criticism in the way we have just shown, and having learned to discriminate between the element of legend or traditional corruption in the Gospels and the element of real history, wished to free at least the teaching of Jesus from all irrational elements. When they read of miraculous cures in the Gospel narratives, it was their endeavour to show that they were legends devised by Christ's disciples to set forth His

power; and when they found in the Gospels predictions on the part of Jesus concerning the approaching end of the world, they argued that His words had been distorted by hearers imbued with the Jewish superstitions then prevalent.

The teaching of Jesus was expressed in the outward forms and in accordance with the scientific notions of His time.

Frequently these Liberals were right, but their preconceptions led them too far in the above direction. Their disinclination to admit that the teaching of Jesus could contain anything irrational and therefore inadmissible, was, without their knowing it, a last vestige of the belief in the infallibility of the Bible. The progress of historical science has once and for all freed modern Liberal Protestantism from this survival of Protestant Scholastic theology.

Every historian who respects himself considers it his strict duty not to admit or reject the truth of a statement merely because the fact related is or is not in agreement with his own beliefs or ideas, but rather

according to the degree of trustworthiness which the statement presents. Now, from what is related in the Gospels, it is beyond doubt that Jesus believed in the approaching end of the world as it existed in His day, and in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in the near future; it is beyond doubt that He admitted the existence of demons, and that when He effected the cure of sick people He believed He was driving these demons from the bodies of their victims. It is certain that Jesus shared in the ideas current among the Jews of His day regarding the place of the earth in the universe and the respective positions of the earth and the heavens. We no longer hold these ideas; we know that the world did not end shortly after the coming of Christ; we attribute diseases to microbes and not to demons. There is not a single person to-day, even among those Christians who think themselves most strictly bound down to the literal teaching of the Bible, who entertains on all

these questions the same notions as Jesus and His apostles.

The immense service rendered to us by scientific history is that it has taught us that the men of each successive age have shared in the beliefs, ideas, and scientific conceptions of their time, and that it is absurd to expect them to have possessed our own, because in that case none of their contemporaries would have understood them, and life would have been impossible for them in the society in which they lived.

Jesus, therefore, had the knowledge which was attainable in His day among the Jews. His teaching was given in the outward form, and subject to the conditions imposed by the surroundings in which He moved. They are no longer the same now, and no one to-day can subscribe to them. The simplest child nowadays knows that the earth revolves round the sun, whereas, in the mind of Jesus and of the whole of antiquity, the sun moved round the earth. Liberal Protestantism frankly

accepts these lessons of history. It does not scruple to admit that there were errors in the mind of Christ, that Jesus was no more infallible than any other creature of God, that consequently we are not to adhere to His teaching simply because it comes from Him, but only after we have seen the teaching to be true.

The value of the religious and moral teaching of Jesus for us is independent of the local and temporary forms in which it was embodied, such is the important point to be grasped—it is one of the fundamental theses of Liberal Protestantism. The historian and the theologian may be greatly interested in enquiring whether a given saying was really uttered by Jesus in the form in which we have it, if a given narrative in the Gospels presents sufficient guarantees as to authenticity, how the story of a given miracle was formed, or how this or that act of Christ may be explained. These questions are of purely secondary importance for the religious and

moral life of men to-day. The faith of a Liberal Protestant does not depend upon the solution of a problem of historical criticism; it is founded upon free personal acceptance of the spirit and guiding principles of the Gospel of Christ, and, above all, upon his own experience of their value and power.

The Gospel of Jesus consists neither in dogmas nor in rites; it is religion and ethics indissolubly associated in the conscience.

The study of our Gospels clearly shows that in the mind of Jesus religion did not consist in a body of theological, physical, or metaphysical doctrines. What Jesus required of His disciples was not that they should believe in the Trinity, nor indeed hold any metaphysical doctrine concerning His person; neither that they should accept certain doctrines regarding the essence of God, the nature of the soul, the mode of creation, or the origin of evil. He did not demand that they should entertain the same notions as He did about demons or the cause of the phenomena of the external world. Nor did He require His followers to believe in His

resurrection, which came as a surprise to His apostles, and of which He must therefore have discoursed with them but little. Neither did He bid them comply with a number of pious observances or practices, and celebrate rites or obey any particular ecclesiastical authority. You may make a minute examination of all the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels, in which alone we can find historical statements: you will nowhere find anything of the sort. On the contrary, you will see throughout that Jesus combats the intellectual and theological religion of the Scribes, the formalistic religion of the Pharisees, and the ritualistic religion of the Sadducees. What we are saying is not prompted by a few isolated passages in the Gospels. The historical authority of isolated texts is, as we have seen, questionable, on account of the conditions which presided over the composition of our Gospels. What we have said constitutes the background, the very texture, of the Gospel records of the Jewish-Christian

Matthew, of the liberal Luke, and of the annalist Mark. Unless we arbitrarily and unscientifically reduce the whole of the Gospel narratives to the proportions of a romance, we cannot deny that such are indeed the essential principles of Jesus' preaching.

Thus, when we Liberal Protestants say that the Christian religion does not consist in subscription to a set of dogmas or to a system of doctrines touching God, Christ, Redemption, etc.; when we maintain that the Christian religion consists neither in the repetition of certain litanies, nor in the practice of certain sacraments, nor in the external devotions in which it has pleased all the Churches to indulge, we are in complete agreement with the teaching of Jesus, and we are entitled to say that we are standing on truly Christian ground.

The Gospel as Jesus preached it is simply religion and ethics indissolubly united in the depths of the human conscience. It is not even a manual of ethics, a summary or a codification of moral obligations and duties

grouped under certain heads and reduced to formulas. Rather it is the moral life in word and in deed, piety in action, an attitude of the heart and conscience, the communication of a spirit penetrating the soul like leaven and acting as an agent of the spiritual life, to cleanse, strengthen, and raise it towards the heights of the Divine Life and the moral ideal.

Jesus came to invite men, all men, of every class, race, and creed, to enter into the Kingdom of God. He bid them repent and cultivate a lively feeling of their wretchedness and faults, not indeed in order to lose themselves in despairing revolt, nor to sink beneath the feeling of their native and fatal powerlessness, but in order, on the contrary, that the consciousness of their many wants might give rise in their hearts to an ardent desire for restoration, to an intense longing for release, and a better, juster, purer, happier, holier life, and that they might gain the divine forgiveness through this renewing of their being. He

also opened out to them the inexhaustible treasures of love for the Heavenly Father and of love for their brethren, saying to them: Come unto Me, prove the benefits which I bring you; do the will of your Father who is in Heaven and who speaks to you, not in the thunder of Sinai and the oracles of the sanctuary, but through the consciences of men, of prophets, of the Son of Man, of the best and holiest of His children, in the only living sanctuary, that is, in your own heart, in the inmost depths of your soul. Be just, for God's law is justice; be good, for goodness is the earth's greatest treasure; be merciful, love one another, for love is the source of life; sacrifice yourselves one for another, for happiness lies in mutual sacrifice, in solidarity; aspire to become perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

Its value to us is independent of its local and temporary forms.

It is quite true that Jesus clothed this Gospel in the forms and conceptions peculiar to His day. Having inherited the beliefs and

hopes of His people, He looked upon this Kingdom of God, the coming of which He proclaimed, as about to be established upon earth by a supernatural intervention of the Deity, not of course after the material manner in which the majority of His contemporaries conceived the Messianic revolution, but rather through the rapid transformation of humanity, saved by the Divine Omnipotence from idolatry, error, and sin, and changed into a new humanity. Jesus shared in the ideas of His people concerning the constant intervention of God in the course of nature: in common with the whole of antiquity He believed in miracles. He did not possess, nor indeed could He have held, the scientific notion of the laws of nature, nor the modern conception, so grand and deeply religious, of natural order in the government of the world. To Him, as to every other Jew, miracle was the natural mode of divine activity. On these points He was mistaken, as in His ideas regarding demons and the physical constitution of the world.

But in what way does that alter the value of His religion or of His ethical teaching?

Because the establishment of a just, pure, and holy humanity, and of God's reign upon earth, is not to be effected speedily, within a short space of time, and by supernatural interposition, does it follow that we are not to labour towards its establishment, repent of our sins, realise our misery, and become regenerate through justice, goodness, and love? Because the world is ruled by divine laws and not by the miraculous intervention of a God providing at every turn for the needs of the moment, does it follow that we are not, in either case, entirely in the hands of the sovereign Power which governs the world, and that wisdom, happiness, and the higher life do not consist, to-day as of yore, in confident submission to the supreme Will which shapes our destinies, and in seeking, as the highest good, communion with the perfect Being, who is the fulness of the moral order?

But, if it were not so, if the strictly religious

and ethical teaching of Jesus were not independent of the local forms and transitory doctrines in which He embodied it, not a single Christian would now be found on the earth, at least not in the civilised world. For there is certainly not a single man to-day who has the same ideas as Jesus or His apostles about God, angels, demons, the physical world and its phenomena—in a word, about nature as a whole.

The truth, as the history of Christendom clearly shows, is that you may hold doctrines most dissimilar and even irreconcilable concerning the essence of God and God's government of the world, and yet be equally good and faithful disciples of Christ, so long as you exhibit towards this God, as you conceive Him, the sentiments of submission, trust, love, and consecration to His will, which Jesus bids you have, so long as you strive to conform your actions and life to these sentiments. The fact is, that there were good and faithful Christians, of truly evangelical piety, among

the humble believers in those early communities, whose theology was puerile, just as among the Greek Idealists, who conceived of God after the manner of Origen; among the Trinitarians of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy just as among the rationalists or among the followers of the various religious philosophies which at different periods since the Renaissance have been in favour among Christians. Newton and Pasteur certainly did not conceive of God and the manner of God's government of the world in the same way as the simple charwomen who swept out their studies. And yet these poor women may have been quite as good Christians as these great men of genius, provided they manifested towards God the frame of mind recommended in the Gospel, and drew from their piety, naïve enough it may be, that strength, consolation, and hope which they required in order to lead worthy lives.[1] The formidable problems

[1] The members of the same church who repeat the same phrases of an orthodox catechism, full of metaphysical for-

of metaphysical theology greatly exceed the capacity of the human mind. As the pious Jews of former times most justly said: no man hath seen God face to face at any time. God is beyond all human conception, science and modern piety now aver. We each of us form a picture of God as best we can, according to the degree of our instruction or the intellectual power with which we are gifted. But the wisest and most intelligent are compelled to rest content with an incomplete and imperfect conception of the Being who is beyond all comprehension, and they can only speak of Him in metaphors.

What we have just said about God and the government of the world applies equally to all the other subjects of religious speculation, to our origin, to the nature of the soul and the destiny of the universe. These are problems which lie beyond us, problems about which we

mulas, do not understand these identical terms in the same manner. According to the degree of their knowledge and the keenness of their insight, they form totally different conceptions of the meaning of the formulas which they learn.

can only formulate hypotheses, and concerning which, at all events, the words of Jesus teach us nothing. For they are problems of the philosophical order, of the utmost interest for the thoughtful and religious man, but which, strictly speaking, do not constitute religion.

Difference between religious philosophy and religion.

Religion—and it is essential to grasp clearly this great lesson of religious history and psychology—religion is not the same thing as religious philosophy, although it is constantly associated with philosophical or dogmatic conceptions and despite the fact that they are very often looked upon as the same. Religion teaches us nothing either about God's nature or our own; it is compatible with different views of God and man; it is essentially a principle of life, the feeling of *a living relation between the human individual and the powers or power of which the universe is the manifestation.* What characterises each religion is its way of looking upon this relation and its method of applying it.

Man, at every stage of civilisation, from the savage to the modern scientist, has either an instinctive or a reasoned feeling that he is not alone in the world, that he is in relation with other beings, with the elements which surround him, with the innumerable forces which act upon him ; in a word, he feels instinctively, and by reason of his experience ceaselessly renewed, that he is in constant relation with the world, with things in general, with the universe. He knows, by repeated experiences, that, left to himself, he is utterly dependent upon the world around him, either in order to obtain the food and material commodities necessary for his subsistence, or to ward off the countless dangers which menace his existence. It is generally admitted that this feeling of dependence upon the universe is the root of all religion.

Now the mere consciousness of our dependence does not suffice to constitute the religious life. While man feels himself dependent upon the universe, he also feels that

there is interaction between the universe and himself, that he is not purely passive. Man feels that he is alive; even at the lowest stages of civilisation, he intuitively knows that the universe around him is also full of life. This intuition assumes precision as man rises. At first, all the phenomena of nature appear to him as so many manifestations of living beings, of spirits or genii, which he imagines, by analogy with himself, to be more or less similar to his own spirit. Little by little, as he learns to classify his perceptions, and as he begins to reflect, he reduces the numerous phenomena which strike his intelligence to a smaller number of general causes, personified in a hierarchy of spiritual powers. Then, either because one of these powers stands out, for one reason or another, as so far superior to all the others that these sink into obscurity, leaving it alone in the field, or because philosophy has taught man to reduce all the varieties of the universe to the unity of one supreme principle, he ends

by concentrating upon a single God the adoration which formerly he bestowed upon several gods.

Man will further picture this unique God in an anthropomorphic manner, as a supreme mind and will, similar to his own mind and will, but infinitely superior in power, for man cannot picture to himself other beings except by analogy with the data of his own experience—or else he will picture God in a more abstract way according as he comes to see how inadequate all these anthropomorphic expressions are when applied to the supreme Being—but he will never cease to have the firm assurance that this supreme Being, this principle of the universe, is a living Being. And at this point reflection confirms his intuition. For, notwithstanding that science can tell us nothing about the inner nature of God which passes all understanding, there is a fact from which the human mind cannot escape, namely, that the universal order, of which man is a part and on which he feels he

is absolutely dependent, comprises life, since man who is part of it is alive, and also that the supreme principle of this universal order can only be a living God, since He is the cause of life, and life alone can produce life.

Thus, however man may picture to himself the Deity—which is a matter of religious philosophy, varying according to the degree of his intellectual development and knowledge—he is conscious that his relation towards the universe is that of one living being to another (not now of one man to another), that between the universe and himself there is action and reaction, a living relation. This it is which, rightly speaking, constitutes religion, at every stage of the religious evolution of humanity. There is no religion without a living God.[1]

What is the nature of these actions and

[1] The central principle of the Augustinian and Calvinistic faith, as well as of all the great doctors of Christendom: the absolute sovereignty of God and man's absolute dependence upon God,—is what modern science calls the sovereignty of universal order. It is the point at which faith and science meet.

reactions? How does this living relation between the universe and man take place? What are its characteristics? Such are the questions which differentiate the great historic religions. Some dwell more on the divine Omnipotence—either of one or of many gods—others rather upon the means at man's disposal to obtain Heaven's favours; some more on fear, others rather upon practices of devotion.

What distinguishes the Gospel from other religions.

The Gospel proclaims that this relation should be one of love. Whereas Buddhism tends to absorb the individual in the great All, of which the visible universe is but a deceptive image, and hence to suppress human individuality; whereas Islamism, emphasising the principle of Judaism, tends to establish a radical and impassable barrier between Allah and the faithful, the Christian Gospel is essentially characterised by its declaration that the bond between God and man is one of love. God is the Heavenly Father; man is the son

of God; God loves man; man ought to love God; the relation between the principle of the universe and the individual is one of love, in which the two terms subsist. God and man —man not losing himself in God, God not remaining aloof from man—meet in a living communion, so that man's dependence on God should no longer be one of compulsion, but of free and joyful self-consecration, and that the sovereignty of God over man should no more appear a tyranny, but a rule which we love and bless.

Such is the distinctive mark of the Christianity of Jesus differentiating it from the other great religions. The history of religions here confirms the conclusion to which we had been led by Biblical criticism and the history of the Church. Dogmatic theology, ecclesiastical institutions, ritual, Christian philosophy have varied down the centuries; the doctrines professed by Jesus and the Apostles have long since disappeared. What has remained, what now remains as the true substance of Christ's

Gospel, is what was for Him, before all else, religion, apart from doctrine and ethics, apart from sacraments and institutions, namely, *God, as the Heavenly Father, whatever may be the philosophical description of the Divine Being; men, as the sons of God, and therefore all brethren, whatever the philosophical notion of man's nature; that is what the Gospel has long since taught us to regard as its essence; it is the sovereign affirmation: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. And these two commandments are one and the same."*

What the Gospel is.

Now, you may have concerning God, creation, the soul, and mankind, what ideas you choose or your degree of instruction may provide,—if you stand by these principles of life, then below successive forms and together with doctrines varying with different stages of civilisation, you are *Christians.*

Liberal Protestantism has often been up-

Is Liberal Protestantism a reduced Christianity?

braided as thus professing a Christianity reduced, diminished, and, so to speak, emptied of its contents. Doubtless, this religion without dogmas, without devotional observances, without magical rites, surprises those who are accustomed to a religion which furnishes them, without any effort of thought on their part, with ready-made solutions for the great problems of metaphysics, and prescriptions destined to assure their salvation. But those who pretend that it is devoid of contents and poor in spirituality are inflicting a gratuitous injury to the Gospel of Christ, seeing Jesus Himself summed up His preaching in this purely religious and ethical profession; they are, moreover, labouring under singular errors respecting our society and our inner spiritual life. Does such a religion appear to you poor and reduced to its lowest expression! Only try to realise it, and you will then know what to think of its so-called inadequacy. Yes, when you have completely realised in your own heart, in your personal

conduct, and in the society in which you live, the love of God and the brotherhood of man; when you have purged your soul of every form of evil; when you have entirely uprooted selfishness out of your life, and have wholly dedicated yourself to the moral order, and to the will of God; when you have fulfilled all that justice requires, and made your life a centre of radiant goodness, then and then only will you be entitled to say that you are not satisfied with such an ideal, and that such a religion is poor and narrow. We need have little fear as to the result of the test.

It upholds the principles of the Gospel in so far as they are principles of life.

Liberal Protestants are persuaded that they are upholding in all their fulness the principles of life contained in the Gospel, the essential elements in the religion of Christ, just as they are conscious of having maintained the Protestant spirit. But they mean to uphold and propagate them, not as idols before which people bow down, nor as articles of a catechism, which men learn by heart, or

as sacred traditions, which are reverenced from afar, on certain days and during appointed ceremonies. For them they are *principles of life*, that is to say, active and fruitful moral forces which should penetrate individual souls and human societies, not, indeed, in order to bind them down to outgrown traditions and to confine them for all time to applications of the past, but, on the contrary, in order to make them continually more faithful, and to inspire them constantly with new applications, in harmony with the altered conditions of science and civilisation. Christ's religion is not in their eyes a revelation closed once and for all, a rule promulgated by Jesus and therefore coming as an external authority, unchangeable, and from the beginning complete in all its parts. They look upon His religion as a germ destined ever to produce new fruits, as a plant which must grow and ever throw out new branches, as a spiritual force which, from age to age and from generation to generation, is to be applied

under new conditions, in order that it may realise, in an ever-increasing measure, its promised blessings. Religion for Liberal Protestants is, and ought to be, ceaseless progress in the spiritual life.

It relies solely upon experience to justify and propagate them.

Now, to propagate this religion they do not rely upon the authority of tradition or of established institutions any more than on that of philosophical argumentation. External authority, be it of a book or of a church, of an ecclesiastical majority or of a pope, has in their eyes no ethical or religious value. To propagate these principles of spiritual life which constitute, in their judgment, the permanent element in Christianity, they rely solely upon their beauty and incomparable moral grandeur, and upon the acceptance which these should elicit from the hearts and consciences of men, because there are no true moral convictions save when truth is freely accepted.

Liberal Protestantism — I desire to insist

upon this point in conclusion—bases religion solely upon religious experience, and not upon theological or philosophical argumentations. It is not a philosophy; it numbers among its adherents men who hold widely differing philosophical opinions and theological convictions, from those who retain a considerable number of traditional doctrines to those who profess a spiritualistic pantheism. It appeals to the religious experience of humanity in the past, most assuredly, because it is always wise to take into account the lessons of the past. He would be rash, indeed, who affected to pay no attention to what humanity has thought and experienced before us. But, then, humanity has thought and experienced many very different things. Therefore, it appeals before all else to the actual experience of the men of to-day.

In thus presenting to the men of our generation, in our highly civilised society, the exclusively religious and ethical Gospel which we have just described, the Gospel which is

summed up in love both of God and of our neighbour, the only appeal it makes to them is the following: "Prove it, go to the fountain-head, come and watch those of your fellow-men who have made this Gospel their own and who have tried to realise it in their lives; learn to understand, by their example, what moral strength, what spiritual power, those who are filled with the love of God and of their brother-men have thus acquired. What you need is not merely theoretical acceptance of facts undeniable in themselves, but the complete submission of your entire soul. Let it now be your own endeavour to love God, to trust the sovereign power which governs this universe in which you are only a small atom, borne along in the infinite stream of universal life even as one of the infinitely small globules of our blood is borne along in the circulation of our human organism; realise the relation between your spirit and the spirit manifested everywhere in and around us, wherever order and law prevail, and learn to feel, as a living

reality, that you proceed from this universal spirit to which you are related by every fibre of your being. Learn to experience the strength, consolation, and hope gained by this trust in God, by this faith which, in the experience of all the great Christians of the past, is the principle of salvation. Ascertain, by personal experience, how great is the joy found in moral communion with this God, in self-denial, in the repentance of our shortcomings, and in the dedication of ourselves to justice, to moral truth, to all that is beautiful in the purest form, to all that is noble and generous. Learn, by your own experience, what elevation, consolation, and sweetness, as well as energy for the struggle, and strength for the accomplishment of duty, are to be found in meditation and prayer, not in the magical and, forsooth, irreligious prayer which would bend the will of the Almighty into conformity with our desires or individual wants, but in the truly Christian prayer, in which the human creature identifies his will with

the will of his Heavenly Father, on earth as in Heaven, and thus enters into the holiest, purest, and most vivifying joys of the spiritual life.

"Learn, also, how love is the source above all others of the very noblest emotions which we can experience here below, how in our sorrows and bereavements, as in our hours of blessing, love—the consecration of ourselves to others, to those whom we love, to our fellow-men—is the act a thousand times blest which beautifies and ever ennobles our lives. Learn what holy joy there is in labouring, not for our own selfish ends, but for the good of others, for those around us, for our family, our country, and humanity, in practising and furthering justice in our midst. Learn all these things, not from the works of moralists or the lips of preachers, but from your own experience, in your own heart and conscience. Then you will be Christians indeed, for there is no other way that can lead you to Christianity in spirit and in truth."

Liberal Protestants believe in the power of the Gospel, embraced in its religious and moral essence, in the Gospel, independent of the temporary doctrinal or ecclesiastical forms which it has assumed during the course of its already long existence, or in which it is still embodied to-day. They adhere to the Gospel because they have experienced its power. The Gospel is for them Light and Life: and they believe that the Light must lighten all those whose eyes are not darkened and the Life rekindle the spirit and revive the ardour of those whose hearts open to welcome it.

III

LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM FOUNDED ON MORAL EXPERIENCE

SIN, MORAL SOLIDARITY, THE WORK OF CHRIST.

Liberal Protestantism rejects the traditional dogmas concerning original sin and redemption by substitution, but not the moral experiences which inspired them.

Modern Liberal Protestantism rejects the traditional doctrines of Catholic or Protestant orthodoxy on original sin and redemption by Christ's sacrifice as a ransom for guilty humanity, just as it repudiates the dogmas of the Trinity and the metaphysical Divinity of Christ, and for the same motives. They cannot be accepted by reason; they are foreign to the original teaching of Christ; and history, now more fully known than in the past, has taught us what theological evolution and what leaven of Greek philosophical doctrines and Jewish Rabbinical speculations have introduced these dogmas into Christianity.

But while rejecting these dogmas, Liberal Protestantism in no wise desires to dispute the value of the religious or ethical experiences which they inadequately explain. Experiences are facts of the moral life which exist in themselves and which no one can explain away. Dogmas are mere philosophical hypotheses, open to revision like all other doctrines of the past, and which cannot escape from such revision because it has seemed good to certain assemblies of prelates or theologians to sanction them. Liberal Protestantism takes its stand upon moral experience, past and present, just as previously we saw it resting upon the religious experience of healthy-minded piety.

The dogma of original sin and of the fundamental corruption of the human race is indissolubly bound up with a conception of history which no well-instructed person in our day can possibly hold. The splendid narratives of the creation and the fall, in *Genesis*, can appear to us now nothing more

than legends of a very high religious inspiration, but absolutely devoid of historical or scientific authority. And the experience of humanity proves that the notion of the fundamental corruption of man and of his total inability to do the right, except in the Christian community, is contradicted by countless observations.

But beneath this dogma which history condemns, and which fails to offer a satisfactory explanation of the origin of evil, there lie grand religious experiences of which it is the symbolical expression, namely: the consciousness of the universality of sin and of the baneful consequences which sin fatally entails in the human race; the feeling of bondage which evil gives to him who becomes its victim; the very primitive and deep-seated notion of the solidarity which binds men one to another, not only within the society of their day, but from generation to generation throughout time and space.

These are the general experiences of the race, more or less keenly felt at different periods in its history, but equally well-founded in all times, and illustrated with fresh clearness by social science. Evil is a tragic reality, both in the individual and in society. Sin is a fact which forces itself upon the most superficial observer. Whether we see in it, as did the Greeks and Hindoos, a result of ignorance, or, as did the Semites, the work of a perverse will, explain it as we may, evil is everywhere, in the heart of individual man and in the social organism. At certain periods men are inclined to throw the responsibility mainly on the individual; at others, as in our day, men are more apt to consider society as chiefly to blame, and to think that with better institutions evil in the individual might be made to disappear. But a more thoughtful examination, uninfluenced by contemporary political and social preoccupations, confirms the old Christian belief that evil is at once in the individual and in society, and that both must

equally be reclaimed in order to conquer it, or at least to lessen its ravages.

Liberal Protestantism by no means denies the gravity or the extent of sin in humanity, as has so often been maintained. It only affirms that the explanations brought forward by the Church or by philosophers to solve the problem of the origin of evil are wholly inadequate; indeed it is, above all others, the insoluble problem. But it does not consider the philosophical solution of the mystery to be the important matter for our religious and moral life. On this point, as on the other questions of theology and philosophy, there are great differences of doctrine among its adherents. No matter! The all-important thing is that the simple fact of the power of sin be recognised, that men be led to have a lively feeling of the evil in themselves as well as around them—for we are always more ready to detect it in others than in ourselves—and thus to aid in the fight against sin, both by dispelling the ignorance

which produces it and by striving to correct the evil tendencies which lead men to do the wrong, even when their conscience tells them the good they should do, when they know what is right and are not therefore sinning through ignorance.

But while still retaining, as does the Christian tradition, the consciousness of the universality and of the terrible power of evil, Liberal Protestantism has been unable to ignore the facts of human experience, in antiquity as in our day, among non-Christian peoples as in our modern societies in which civilisation is so strangely varied. It has learnt to see that everywhere, among all peoples, in every race, in every religion, good is found side by side with evil, sublime actions beside crimes, splendid aspirations towards a higher life, and heroic sacrifices by the side of base passions and brutal selfishness. So that, without in the least minimising the sorrow caused by sin and without attempting to deceive men as to their moral wretched-

ness, Liberal Protestants have perforce rejected, in the light of the clearest evidence, the belief in man's natural incapacity for good and the idea of the native corruption of the human race.

Man is neither absolutely good nor utterly bad; he is at once good and bad, now a little better, now a little worse. The very standard of good and evil varies according to the degree of civilisation; it is not the same for the man of culture as for the uneducated man, for a Christian or a Buddhist as for a native of Australia or a Negro. The content of the moral law evolves like the content of the mind. Moral obligation everywhere remains, like the categories of reason.

Thus it is by appealing to what is good and healthy in human nature, by labouring to develop the good elements which it contains, to strengthen and broaden them, making them more powerful and active, that we can fight against the kingdom of evil and the tyranny of sin. Moralists, preachers, reformers have

never acted otherwise. Even those who have most lowered human nature have been forced to resort to persuasion and to appeal to man's interests rightly understood, to the mind, imagination, and conscience of their fellowmen, in order to lead them to embrace the means of salvation which they were recommending.

The moral life of humanity proceeds by evolution, not by revolution.

The education of society, like that of the individual, is a tedious, protracted, and difficult work. The history of the past, no less than what we see in our own day, proves that moral changes do not take place suddenly, save, perhaps, in a small number of exceptional cases. Even then a minute psychological study of these exceptional cases generally reveals that the apparently sudden moral crisis is in fact only the result of latent forces long since at work. The moral life of humanity, like physical life in the universe, proceeds by *evolution*, not by revolution. This is one of the general truths which modern science has most surely established in every department.

We must, therefore, give up dividing the history of humanity into great contrasted periods: the reign of evil and the reign of good; the dispensation of sin and condemnation and that of grace and salvation. Of course, this is an old Christian idea. It was the custom among the early Christians to contrast the new society which they were founding with the previous state of society, as light with darkness. The Christians were 'the saints'; all other men were 'the wicked.' At all times reformers have been wont to proclaim themselves the messengers of absolute truth to the world, the revealers of the final solution of human misery, whereas before them error and injustice prevailed. This shortcoming is not peculiar to Christians. How many of our contemporaries look upon the Revolution of 1789 as a new era of social well-being, following upon one of darkness and ignorance?

But in the Church and in Christian theology this idea has shown greater power and vitality than anywhere else. Closely associated with

their Jewish origin, it was the immediate outcome of the Messianic expectation and of the ardent conviction prevalent among the Jews that, by some sudden supernatural revolution, the Kingdom of God would be established upon earth and would put an end for ever to the kingdoms of idolatry, error, and sin. The Christians spiritualised these beliefs, stripping them of their material and grosser elements. But the Church still maintained the principle. And when experience showed that the supernatural revolution, looked upon as shortly about to take place, was not being accomplished, the Church identified herself with the Kingdom of God on earth, and consigned the final Kingdom of God to the next world, defending more than ever the proposition that in the Church, and there only, was to be found salvation, regeneration, and the kingdom of righteousness; whilst outside her pale, either among the countless peoples who had sojourned upon the earth before her coming, or among the races which remained outside her influence, or

even among those who, in Christian lands, did not bow to her decisions, all men were given over to sin, error, and damnation.

Whatever the antiquity of such notions, Liberal Protestants reject them with all their might, not only because, in their eyes, these ideas are supremely unjust and immoral, but above all because they are belied by the universal experience of humanity. It is not true that there was nothing but error, sin, and moral worthlessness in the non-Christian peoples of antiquity or of more modern times: they often exhibited a very beautiful religious and moral life, the inspiration of which was at times eminently noble; they have bequeathed to us examples and writings which, even now, constitute one of the most treasured portions of the spiritual inheritance of humanity. Nor, again, is it true that the Christian society, the Church, has always and everywhere been the abode of righteousness, justice, and purity, and that sin has not raged there as elsewhere. It is certainly far from our intention to deny the

moral greatness of the Church, and we shall never be found on the side of those who, through reaction against her exaggerated claims, fail to recognise the splendid gifts of devotion and high morality which she has lavished upon humanity. But it must be admitted that ecclesiastical history teems with examples of moral weakness, crimes, and scandals within this so-called perfect society, which absolutely forbid our hailing it as the society of saints substituted for the society of sinners.

Experience proves that the regeneration of humanity is secured neither by the sacraments nor by dogmatic faith.

Of course, it is answered: all those who are members of the Church are not free from sin. They are but men—of themselves feeble and powerless. But the Church has the means of purifying them again and again; she can save them from the dire consequences of their sins, and thus restore them to the state of salvation, by making them share in the benefits of the expiatory sacrifice by which Christ paid for sinners the ransom of their sin. If

you are a Catholic, it is by means of the sacraments that you will be made partakers in this regeneration and salvation. If you are an orthodox Protestant, it will be through faith in the infinite merit of the satisfaction freely offered by the Son of God.

Liberal Protestantism cannot subscribe to either of these two doctrines. In the Gospel of Jesus there are no sacraments. Baptism and the Holy Communion, which alone date from the beginning of Christianity, had not then in the slightest degree either the nature or the value of ecclesiastical sacraments. Whoever is acquainted with the results of historical criticism knows this. And as to the dogma of vicarious sacrifice, it is not only foreign to the Gospel, but is even contrary to its essential principles. In the Gospel of Jesus, God is the Heavenly Father who forgives the repenting sinner, just because divine justice is higher than human justice, and because He is full of mercy and not of anger. In order to pardon the prodigal son,

the father in the parable has no need to sacrifice his eldest son. The sacraments of Catholicism are only magical operations, without the slightest value in the eyes of reason, and the God who can only forgive men's trespasses by inflicting infinite suffering upon an innocent person in place of the guilty, is a monstrous God whom we cannot adore, seeing the meanest man with any delicacy of conscience is morally superior to such a God.

Besides, it is quite useless to engage in dogmatic discussions. We claim to take our stand solely upon experience, and upon facts which anyone may verify. Now, it is perfectly obvious that there are a great number of men who never fail to attend all the sacraments and others who unreservedly believe in redemption through the blood of Christ, and yet who, far from being saints, yield themselves over to sin more than many others who care nothing for sacraments and orthodox doctrine.

This experience has long since sufficed to convince Liberal Protestants that it is neither through sacraments and the acceptance of the dogma of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ that the triumph of good over evil and the regeneration of humanity can be attained. As soon as we have given up the old exclusivism of the Christian Churches, as soon as we grant that non-Christians may also be saved (to use the traditional phrase), that is, escape from the tyranny of evil and attain a healthy spiritual and moral life, whilst Christians obedient to rites and dogmas may still remain the slaves of sin; in a word, as soon as we give up the terrible but logical doctrine according to which whoever does not partake of the means of grace provided by the traditional Churches is a being lost and damned, we must perforce draw the conclusion that man is not saved by the sacraments of the Church or by belief in certain dogmas. Liberal Protestants fail to understand how the adepts of traditional orthodoxy, Catholic or Protestant, can escape this

irresistible conclusion. Yet, are there many among them who would to-day carry logical reasoning to the extent of styling the virtues of the Pagans 'splendid sins,' as did Saint Augustin, or who would have the courage to damn the immense majority of men for not having like themselves received absolution or believed in redemption by the blood of Christ? The heart judges better than the head. But thoughtful men cannot rest content with compromises so full of contradictions. In this matter Liberal Protestantism openly asserts what many people think, although they do not give expression to their thought, often failing to grasp the true import of the belief: evil, at all times, among all races, and in all religions, can only be attacked with moral weapons, never by means of magical practices or by merely intellectual beliefs. In every age the fight goes on, and this it is which lends its dignity to human life.

Since sin proceeds both from error and a

perverse will, the work of individual and social regeneration must consist both in spreading truth and in correcting the evil tendencies of the individual. These two methods are equally indispensable.

Instruction and education. Moral solidarity.

One of the most grievous mistakes made by modern democracy in its reaction against the Church has been to imagine that it was enough to instruct men in order to regenerate them. Truly, instruction is a necessary condition of moral progress. Everywhere, in Europe and in America, Liberal Protestants have been the indefatigable promoters of popular instruction. But they have also everywhere strenuously demanded that instruction alone should not be looked upon as the moral panacea. Without the education of the heart and of the conscience instruction is morally worthless. The acquisition of fresh knowledge, especially the elementary knowledge which constitutes the mental equipment of the immense majority of men, no more influences the will for good than for evil. It

emancipates the mind, accustoms it to think, and prepares it to exercise its responsibility; it furbishes the instrument of the moral life. But science of itself has no moral efficacy; it merely establishes facts, and from these draws consequences; it explains, and by so doing justifies before reason all that exists. It furnishes improved materials for vice as well as for virtue.

In order that instruction may be morally fruitful it must go hand in hand with and be thoroughly penetrated by education, so as to strengthen the good elements in our nature, to remedy our spiritual defects, and to impart to us the principles of moral life which we lack. This task is far more difficult than that of imparting knowledge. It is not capable of being reduced to maxims and formulas, nor is it accomplished by mechanical processes. It is essentially initiation into a higher form of existence, the revelation of an ideal, the beauty and grandeur of which captivate the soul, a transfusion of life from teacher to pupil, the

imparting of a mind, an energy, and a will for the good.

Moral education is above all the result of experience, the experience of others as well as our own, of those who bring us up and instruct us, of those who have preceded us in life and whose precepts and examples have come down to us in their biography, their writings, and all that makes them live again for us. It is the blessed infection of good, no less real than the infection of evil, the dire physical and moral effects of which we so often witness.

The solidarity which unites men through time and space is nowhere seen to be more powerful than in the realm of the moral life, which is, above all, man's sphere. Instruction, even civilisation itself, are possible only thanks to solidarity. The knowledge which we are able to acquire to-day, the many blessings which we all enjoy, even the most wretched among us, in these our highly-cultured societies, are only ours as a result of the accumulated

labours and successive discoveries of the innumerable generations which have preceded us. Without them we should have reaped none of these benefits; we should be nothing more than a variety of the animal species. How much more is this true in the matter of education and in the realm of the moral life, that highest product of human life!

What profound truth is contained in the doctrine in which the Christian society has enshrined the experience of humanity: left to himself alone, man is unable to act aright! Abandoned to his own resources, every human being would be as powerless to fight against sin as against ignorance. Our moral life comes to us from the past, from the long apprenticeship of life on the part of the generations which have preceded us, from that lengthy chain of accumulated experiences which, by degrees, have taught those who came after, the way of truth, justice, and goodness.

At all times men have had a more or less

reasoned intuition of these conditions of the moral life. Indeed, it is neither chance, nor the ability of a few spiritual leaders, but nature itself that in every age has led men, conscious of their weakness, eager to throw off the yoke of sin and the limitations of the lower life, to seek guidance, strength, and moral inspiration from those who appeared to them in the past to have been teachers of humanity, possessors of higher spiritual power, incarnations of wisdom, and of a life of purity and holiness. At one time they have turned to the poet who, in his immortal verse, enabled them to hold fellowship with the heroes of the past[1]; at another they have followed the sage who, above the murmur of the crowd and the strife of the day, had contemplated the calm beauty of eternal wisdom. Here they have been guided by men who stood for time-honoured tradition; elsewhere they have sought life from the strong individuality of a prophet or

Humanity has always sought its moral life from the masters of the human soul.

[1] In Græco-Roman society Homer's poems had thus become a source of education and of moral life.

reformer. More frequently still they have gone to those superior beings whose powerful personality towers high above the whole of history, because the word of life which they brought to men appeared so strong and grand that they have been taken for messengers or even incarnations of the Eternal, to Confucius, Mohammed, Cakyamouni the Buddha, Jesus the Christ.

These are facts, which modern scientific history has fully brought to light, and not theories. Their very universality warrants our considering them as so many different manifestations of a general tendency of the human mind. It is absurd to attempt to escape from the solidarity which holds throughout the moral life of humanity. And to misunderstand the important lesson taught us by the form which this solidarity has assumed in history is quite as unreasonable as to fail to recognise the transformations of the moral ideal in the past, and to imagine that we are for ever tied down to the

traditional ideal to which the Church claims to bind us.

Man, in his struggle against sin, needs to draw his inspiration and strength from a reliable source. He must freely drink of it, not in order to give way to the sleep of self-content, but, on the contrary, in order to advance, refreshed and renewed, that he may do better and more than in the past. Such are the lessons of human experience on which Liberal Protestants base their declaration to the men of their day, that vain were the attempt to break with the moral links which bind them to the past, that their duty is to preserve what, in this moral past, is best, greatest, most beautiful and hallowed, in order to make it their own and the very principle of their struggle against evil, in other words, of their salvation. For if they refuse to do so, our contemporaries will not thereby give up seeking their moral inspiration from other men. They will ask for a poisoned draught at the hands of politicians of low degree, for lack of a pure

fountain to which they will no longer have access.

Experience proves the excellence of the moral inspiration drawn from the Gospel.

Liberal Protestants—we have already said this, and we wish to emphasise it—are not narrow-minded. Wherever there are lessons, examples, and aids to be found in the spiritual life of humanity, whether in Greek philosophy, in Buddhism, in Islamism or elsewhere, they urge the men of their day to make use of them. But in the name of historical experience, as in the name of the personal experience of millions of our fellow-men to-day, they deem that no fountain of spiritual life in the past is as pure and health-giving as the Gospel of Christ; and, solely from this consideration of an experimental order, they offer this Gospel as the very best antidote for sin, as the most potent agent for the perpetual regeneration of mankind.

It can hardly be denied that those portions of mankind which have adopted Christianity have thereby acquired a vital energy superior

to that of all others, and that in them alone the highest civilisation has flourished. History no less clearly shows that, throughout the whole course of its development, Christianity has constantly acquired fresh strength and new spiritual insight by going back to the teaching of the Gospel, to correct the errors and abuses which had become prevalent in the moral order through the passions of men or the degeneracy of institutions. And when we, men of the twentieth century, examine ourselves, do we not feel that what is best in us comes from centuries of education inspired by the Gospel?

Where else have we learned the dignity of the human soul, even in the humblest and most degraded being, save in the Gospel, which for nineteen centuries has been slowly and progressively teaching us to look upon even the lowest among us as a child of our Heavenly Father, whose soul is of infinite value? Where else have men learned to believe in their superior destiny and to find

their ideal, not in enjoyment, or in taking advantage of their fellow-men, or in any form of selfishness, but in the working out of a sublime moral purpose? Where else have they caught the echo of these words which state the condition of all higher morality: "What shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" What form of religion has taught them more forcibly that man cannot be regenerated by the observance of rites or the practice of external devotions, but by faith in the sovereignty of the moral order, identified with the will of God, and that this faith even is nothing but a vain phantasm, unless it is constantly manifested in works, and expressed in a life wholly guided by its inspiration? Where better than in the Gospel has man been able to learn to cast off every species of sacerdotal or theological yoke, that he may rise to the autonomy of the conscience, obedient to the divine will in the perfect liberty of the children of God, solely because he has come to understand its

sovereign beauty? Who has more diligently taught men to hunger and thirst after justice, to show mercy to the repentant sinner, to have a conscious feeling of the intimate bond which unites all men, so that when one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it? Who set forth in clearer light the brotherhood of man, founding it on our very nature, seeing we are all sons of the same Father? Who more assiduously proclaimed love the mainspring of life or more vividly illustrated the supreme grandeur of self-sacrifice, at once the principle and consummation of the victory over sin? Who, in fine, placed in the heart of man that insatiable desire for progress, which henceforth stamped with the seal of election the peoples brought up in its school, holding up to them that splendid ideal of life and activity, of ceaseless reform and search for what is fuller and better, which is the realisation of God's reign upon earth, exhorting them to be perfect even as their Father in Heaven is perfect, and thus

producing in them a continual improvement?

We have no right, because the Church has perpetually buried the Gospel beneath her dogmas and rites, to deny these unique characteristics of the Gospel, which render it, in the full acceptation of the term, the highest ideal and the greatest moral force which the world has seen. Dogmas and rites have had their day. The Gospel, which has been in the past the vivifying moral principle, beneath dogmas and rites, like those subterranean sources which, entertaining the moisture of the deeper layers of the soil, make it possible for strong and deep-rooted plants to acquire new life in spite of the aridity of the higher layers,—the Gospel must remain, that it may adapt itself to the new conditions created by the science and civilisation of our day, assuming new forms in accordance with the needs of new times, and continuing to act in humanity as the leaven of moral progress and of individual and social regeneration.

Such is the position taken up by Liberal Protestantism. After what we have already said concerning its manner of interpreting the Gospel, it is superfluous to point out again that this life-giving Gospel must not be sought in the letter of the Gospel writings, but in their spirit, in the principles of life which they teach us, and not in some Scholastic application of their precepts.

We are sometimes told that these precepts are to be found elsewhere; that they are not the exclusive possession of the Gospel of Jesus. To be sure, some are also to be found in other religions and in the writings of philosophers. Buddhism, for example, inculcates principles of goodness and charity which seem in nowise inferior to those taught in the Gospel.[1] We do not dream of disputing

[1] It is important to note that the charity inculcated by Buddhism is inspired by the pursuit of the annihilation of life—the Buddhist ideal—and not by a desire to better the conditions of existence of those who are the objects of the charitable act. Owing to the ignorance which generally prevails in these matters, serious misconceptions

the fact. Far from seeing any impoverishment of the Gospel in such comparisons, we hail them rather as a precious confirmation of its incomparable moral worth. Wise men of Egypt and Chaldea, Buddhists of India, Stoics of Greece, let all bring the treasures of their moral experience! More broadly human becomes the foundation of our moral life, the better it is for us. But it is just because we nowhere else find all that the Gospel gives us that we turn to it as to the purest source of the spiritual life.

are frequently entertained on this score. In Buddhism, the important thing for the person who practises charity, as well as for the one who is the object of it, is to escape as far as possible from the chain of cause and effect, which constitutes the fatal texture of the successive existences of each individual being, and to succeed in breaking with every thought, desire, and volition, in order to end by becoming absorbed in universal existence. In the eyes of Buddhism, to live is to suffer; therefore life must be annihilated. In the Gospel of Jesus the object to be attained is the complete expansion of life, freed from suffering and sin. One can easily understand how Buddhism has reduced the nations which have embraced it to a state of torpor, whereas Christianity has vivified them, in proportion to its fidelity to the principles of the Gospel.

Part played by the person of Christ in the moral education of humanity.

In the Gospel we find not only a message, but also a person—Christ. If we resort to the experience of mankind to which we appealed above, if we do not close our eyes to the lessons furnished by the psychological observation of our own times, we see that in the case of the majority of our fellow-men—especially of those who are unfamiliar with intellectual questions—abstract ideas, purely spiritual principles, do not exercise so great an influence as the ideas which present themselves before their minds in forms more concrete and intelligible, and capable of striking their imagination no less than their reason and conscience. This is the case in every religion and in all civilisations. One of the great causes of the Gospel's success was the fact of its being, so to speak, personified in a man—Jesus of Nazareth.

Thinkers too often forget this all-important element in the religious life, and particularly in Christianity. The moral education of mankind, as we saw (p. 98), is not so much

effected by theoretical lessons as by the force of example, by spiritual communion, by the living communication of moral energy from one person to another. It is not difficult to understand that the incarnation of the religious and moral ideal of the Gospel in the person of Him who proclaimed it to the world secures for this Gospel, in the minds of the vast majority of men, an educative force far superior to that which can be attained by the mere inculcation of the precepts of the Gospel. This ideal becomes a living, plastic reality. The history of Jesus resolves itself into an endless parable, the most beautiful of parables, since it illustrates them all.

It was the same natural tendency of the human mind which in ancient times inspired the worship of heroes, and in the Middle Ages the cultus of the saints. In her dogmas touching the Trinity and the two natures united in Christ, the Church has, by deification, consecrated the veneration of Christendom for its founder, and in her dogma of redemption she

has transferred to the Man-God the adoration and love which naturally recoil from the Father sacrificing His Son.

Liberal Protestantism—we have no need to dwell upon this point again—rejects this metaphysical deification of Christ, so foreign to the Gospel that Jesus, with His strict Jewish monotheism, would have been profoundly shocked had He known of it; and that none of the Apostles, lacking a knowledge of Greek philosophy, would have had the slightest inkling of its meaning. But it does not take exception to the feeling that inspired the Christians of the past with these doctrines, by which, in their eagerness to glorify Christ, they have distorted Him and through which they have falsified His teaching. Liberal Protestants are of opinion that the true way to honour Christ is to be filled with His spirit, and that true communion with Him does not consist in prostrating oneself before Him, but in exhibiting in one's life the same piety and consecration to God and one's

brother-men, which were the essence of His own life.

They venerate Jesus as the greatest of all prophets, the purest and holiest conscience whose memory has been preserved by history, as the one in whom moral truth was most completely manifested in a human soul, the one who, throughout His ministry as Messianic reformer — in so far as we can gather — was the living commentary of His Gospel, and who crowned His work by a sacrifice of such perfect moral sublimity that it has become the type and inspiration of countless sacrifices, proceeding from the same obedience to moral truth. We can hardly conceive that the person of Jesus, at once so gentle and so strong, should not speak to the hearts and consciences of men, especially of those who are most capable of feeling moral emotions.

But this spiritual supremacy of the person of Jesus is, in our mind, intimately bound up with the recognition of His full humanity. As soon as Jesus is looked upon as the

incarnation of a God or of a supra-terrestrial being, and therefore as a being raised above the normal conditions of human life, and exempt from all temptation to sin, from error, from the pain and misery of humanity, everything that is best and holiest in His ministry vanishes away, and all that remains is a supernatural being, leading a superhuman life as naturally as any other creature obeying the law of its being.

Moreover, in this case also, Liberal Protestantism does not allow itself to be led into the metaphysical speculations which theologians and philosophers delight in, but which are not of a religious or moral nature. Let each one hold the opinions he chooses in the matter, these speculations will never be anything more than hypotheses. We know the inner nature of no single being, of the lowest creature no more than of the greatest genius. We cannot explain the origin of the smallest insect. How, then, can we claim to know the inner nature and origin of Jesus?

Liberal Protestants, schooled in modern methods, have learned to abdicate all such claims. They consider it their duty to keep to reality, to facts capable of being ascertained and verified. Now it is a fact that we know scarcely anything of the history of Jesus. Although we possess the essential elements of His teaching, we are reduced to a lamentable ignorance concerning His life. In all probability He commenced His public career at about the age of thirty. We know absolutely nothing of what He did before that age. Accordingly it is perfectly useless to expatiate at length, as theologians are too often wont to do, upon the perfect and continued sinlessness of Jesus. The data for such a judgment are wanting. The Gospels furnish us with only a very small number of particulars touching the public ministry itself. By the time they were drawn up, the life of Jesus was already distorted by legend, as is proved by the contradictory accounts of His birth and resurrection. What our Gospels clearly

show—as we stated above—is that Jesus lived the life of the men of His day and station, that He shared their ideas about the constitution of the world and the past history of mankind; that, either at the beginning of His ministry or only towards the close, He became conscious of being the Messiah expected by His fellow-countrymen, and that He believed in the near establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. The Gospels, therefore, most expressly witness to the fact that Jesus was not infallible, but liable to error. This admission may be distressing to those who hold the traditional beliefs, but the fact is indisputable, and Liberal Protestants deem it dishonest to take no account of it in religious instruction.

Nowhere else is the contrast more marked between the convictions of the teachers of the community, all more or less imbued with Biblical criticism, and the beliefs of the bulk of the faithful or the notions of irreligious people. This is to a great extent due to the

fact that those whose mission it is to acquaint the public with the results of the scientific study of the Bible (the only solid and reliable method of study) still cling in too servile a manner to the traditional beliefs, the error of which they admit, while still remaining under their sway, and sometimes also to the fact that they lack the courage faithfully and thoroughly to fulfil their mission as teachers, from a fear lest, by flying in the face of traditional prejudices, they should cause scandal and alienate the good feeling of the faithful, little eager to be disturbed in the peace of their inherited ideas. It follows that in the Churches men obstinately continue to deny the surest results of Biblical criticism and modern science touching the origin of Christianity, while outside the Churches, when men are vaguely aware of the results of modern criticism, they are too often inclined to pay no heed to Christ, because they know that the traditional teaching of the Churches concerning Him is erroneous.

Liberal Protestants perforce entertain different opinions on questions relating to the life of Jesus. From their very nature many of the problems of Biblical criticism are incapable of definite and indisputable solution in every detail. Here we must frequently realise our limitations or rest content with probabilities. Our conclusions will naturally vary with our individual tendencies, and especially with the extent of our historical knowledge. In these questions an honest and conscientious study of the Bible is more than ever necessary.

But where all Liberal Protestants are agreed is in their profound conviction that the Gospel's saving power is independent of the solution of these historical problems, and that it remains unimpaired whatever ideas we may entertain respecting the various events in the life of Jesus or the nature of His personality. Our adhesion to the religious and moral teaching of Jesus does not, in fact, depend upon the idea we have formed of Christ; nor is it because of Jesus' supposed infallibility and

perfect sinlessness that we esteem His moral principles the best and most powerful for good; rather it is because His Gospel impresses us as the embodiment of the very highest moral truth, that we honour Jesus as the greatest benefactor of humanity and the noblest inspirer of our spiritual life. It is not because Jesus was the Messiah or a supernatural being endowed with all kinds of miraculous powers, or even an incarnation of the Deity, that His Gospel is in our eyes the most potent agent in the struggle against sin; rather it is because the experience of Christianity in the past, like our own to-day, teaches us that in this Gospel, and not in dogmas and rites, are to be found plentiful life-giving streams, that with free and untrammelled minds we hail Jesus as the Saviour above all others of a sinful and wretched humanity.

And this adhesion, on our part, to the saving power of the religious and ethical principles of the Gospel is so far independent of any doctrine or conception of the person

of Jesus that we joyfully welcome their beneficial influence wherever it is exercised, even in lands and among nations where the name of Jesus has never been heard, or where men, having heard of Him, do not bow to His name, but where, by the instrumentality of other wise men, of other religious teachers and great souls, people have become acquainted in varying degrees with these same principles of the moral life. Indeed, we would go farther and say: even among those in Christian lands who, having been led into error by the Church and repelled by all the unreasonable doctrines and unhealthy devotions which have been placed under the ægis of her authority, have turned away from the Church, while still practising the principles of her Gospel! For although they have unlearned to say to him Lord! Lord! they have continued to do the will of His Father which is in Heaven. And Jesus Himself has taught us that this and this alone is the test of true discipleship.

According to their temperament, to the

proportion of the mystical element in them, and in accordance with their religious upbringing, many Liberal Protestants continue personally to glorify a more or less ideal Christ, who embodies in their eyes the life-giving power of the Gospel.

For, notwithstanding the fact that we are ignorant about the greater part of the life of Jesus, and although the historical information regarding the short period of His public ministry is scant and often uncertain, it seems lawful to argue from the beauty and excellency of the Gospel to the moral beauty and exceptional purity of the One who conceived and Himself experienced it before imparting it to His disciples. A tree is known by its fruits: it was Jesus Himself who proposed this test of moral truth. In the Gospel we have the very spirit of Christ revealing itself to us and speaking with us, so much so that the spiritual relationship to-day between a follower of the Gospel in spirit and in truth and Jesus is certainly greater than between this same

disciple and almost the whole of his contemporaries.

The personal spiritual communion of the modern Christian with Christ is therefore perfectly justified, and, in most cases, this form of Christian piety, at once more intimate, gentle and quickening in loving souls, answers to religious needs which could not be satisfied by a more rationalistic and austere piety. It is equally mistaken to wish to enforce it as essential to the Christian life—the object of which is, after all, the Gospel of the Heavenly Father and of human brotherhood—as to treat it purely and simply as a superstition and to liken it to the materialistic cultus of the Sacred Heart, as men are too wont to do in the ranks of free thought, where they do not rightly weigh the grave and important reasons which, in the estimation of psychologists, justify this mystic communion of Christians with their Lord.

Each should follow his own inspiration in the matter. The vitality of a religion is proved by this very variety of individual conception

and emotion. The only thing required by a loyal study of the Gospel, is, in the opinion of Liberal Protestants, that we should not allow ourselves to be led by mysticism into offering to this human Christ the worship and adoration due to God alone. For such an attitude is not Protestant, nor is it agreeable to Christ's own teaching. In the Gospels which give us historical accounts of Christ we see Jesus constantly bidding His disciples offer their worship and thanks to God only. If He bids them follow Him, it is not in order to group them round His own person, but only to lead them to God and to initiate them into the life of the children of God. Christolatry, that product of the invasion of Greek Paganism into primitive Christianity, is the absolute negation of the pure monotheism of the Gospel.

Its influence even upon those who reject Him.

Finally, to all those who extol the beauty and excellency of moral principles similar to those of the Gospel and who seek in their

wider application, adapted to the circumstances and needs of the present day, the regeneration of society and the leaven of individual education, but who, more than ever before, have departed from Christ, the first article of their programme consisting either in passing Him over in silence, or in placing Him under an interdict,—Liberal Protestantism says: Do not let yourself be perpetually led into error by the Church; seek instruction in religious matters as you do in every other department; do not go on constantly confounding dogmas, sacraments and practices of devotion with the Gospel of Jesus, but recognise the close tie which, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, still binds you to the Gospel, in order that, in the process of historical evolution, you may the more clearly detect the true filiation of the modern work of moral regeneration and understand that the same spirit of reform, progress and aspiration towards a better state of society, more just and merciful, is ever working in the bosom of humanity.

IV

LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM FOUNDED ON SOCIAL EXPERIENCE

THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

The anti-clerical and anti-dogmatic conception of the Church.

THE purely religious and moral conception which Liberal Protestantism entertains of Christianity likewise requires a purely moral view of the religious community or Church in the society of the present day. Religion cannot be one thing for the religious body as a whole and another for the individuals who compose it.

All the Churches which have sprung from the Reformation are unanimous in rejecting the Catholic conception of an infallible Church endowed with supernatural powers for the administration of the sacraments. No pope, no priest, no monk, such were the watch-words of the Reformation. Any compromise in the matter is equivalent to a renouncement of Protestantism. This is quite obvious; there is

no need to press the point. After the statement of principles given in the preceding lectures, it goes without saying that Liberal Protestantism staunchly upholds these tenets of historic Protestantism.

The pastor in a reformed Church is not a priest. When he affects sacerdotal mannerisms he betrays his mission and belies the very principles which he is pledged to teach. The pastor is a layman. He is, according to the traditional expression, a minister of the Gospel, an instructor chosen by the congregation to teach, propagate, and lead men to practise, the precepts of the Gospel. He arrogates no supernatural or sacerdotal powers. Accordingly, from the beginning, the reformed Churches have required of their pastors a high university training, a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, in order that they may study the Bible in the original languages and understand of themselves without any intervention on the part of ecclesiastical authority, the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures.

Liberal Protestantism, founded as it is upon a scientific knowledge of the Bible and upon historical criticism of the origins of Christianity, is, less than any other section of Protestantism, inclined to treat lightly these provisions for the recruiting of pastors. It requires of them a scientific training, ever more advanced as the general level of instruction rises, because it deems that, in order to discharge the heavy duties of a religious instructor and to undertake the solemn responsibility of an accredited teacher of a congregation, the pastor must increasingly unite with religious zeal and deep spirituality a scientific training, inspiring confidence on the part of the members of the Church.

But Liberal Protestants are not only opposed to the Catholic conception of the Church. They are also averse to a certain dogmatic view of the Church, which early prevailed among the disciples of the Reformation, and which, even to-day, finds favour in the party termed 'orthodox,' but against which

the Protestant spirit has ever reacted. It is evident that men who have freed religion from metaphysics, and who are of opinion that the Christian profession does not consist in the acceptance of certain dogmas or of certain theological doctrines, but in the assimilation and progressive application of the religious and moral principles of the Gospel, cannot admit that the Church, that is to say, the religious community, is based upon subscription to a dogmatic profession of faith. Nowhere in the Gospel narrative can they discover the faintest trace of any such profession put forth by Jesus to His disciples. Confessions of faith, so numerous in the Protestant Churches styled 'orthodox,' are, as we have already seen, merely attempts, on the part of those who framed them, to co-ordinate their own doctrines and interpretations of the Bible. They possess no other sanction than the arguments of those who uphold them. These arguments appear to us insufficient or of no value whatever. We have, therefore, abandoned confessions

of faith, resting content with what reason, conscience, and the Gospel itself teach us, namely, that a Christian Church is a *religious community*, inherently and exclusively religious and moral, and that the only thing needed in order to become a member is to acknowledge the excellency of the principles of the Gospel, as Jesus taught them, and to be prepared to further their realisation, as far as we can, in and around us.

The *raisons d'être* of religious associations or Churches.

What is then the good of churches? people ask from various quarters. Under such conditions there is no more ground for their existence. Liberal Protestants are accused of undermining the Church, and it cannot be denied that, in the case of many of our contemporaries, their abandonment of the Catholic notion of a sacramental Church and of the traditional Protestant conception of a dogmatic Church, has led them to become indifferent to every species of church, although they have not, thereby, ceased to be religious men in

the true sense and in the moral acceptation of the term. We must explain ourselves clearly on this point, and show, on the one hand, that Liberal Protestantism desires to uphold the Church, that it deplores and condemns the indifference manifested by too many liberals towards the ecclesiastical life; and, on the other, that it rejects the close and all too summary identification of the Church with public worship, as if the intensity of a man's religious and moral life could be measured simply by his mechanical attendance at places of worship. This notion is a legacy of the sacramental Church of the past, and is incompatible with a more spiritual conception of religion.

Liberal Protestantism, through the medium of its most accredited representatives, constantly dwells upon the necessity for the existence of the Churches and upon the duty of its adherents to participate in their life. In this it takes its stand upon social experience, just as above we saw it appeal to moral and religious experience.

The history of mankind shows us that, at all times, and among men of every race and degree of civilisation, there have been religious associations, sometimes closely identified with civil society, sometimes distinct or separate, more often of a mixed kind. A religious association is a natural form of human sociability, just as the religious function is a natural form of spiritual activity. We are so constituted that we spontaneously associate together in order that we may exercise our gifts and satisfy our spiritual, moral or æsthetic cravings in common. We institute societies for physical exercise, literary or musical guilds, and many other forms of association. It is manifest that as long as religious needs exist, that is to say, as long as man continues on the earth, religious associations will be found. It required that degree of exasperation which has been provoked in the modern world by clerical pretensions, for men in certain quarters to have been led to overlook this fact so plainly taught by experience.

First and foremost, Liberal Protestantism claims the Church for *public worship*, in common, for it lays great stress upon public worship, while at the same time refusing to identify it purely and simply with the religious life. It desires public worship, either on given days or upon the occasion of solemnities which call for religious gatherings, because it esteems that such worship is indispensable to the religious life of the majority of our fellow-men. Of course it does not forget that the best kind of worship is active submission to the divine will in our daily life, meditation and prayer in secrecy and retirement. But, save perhaps in the case of a small number of superior souls, this very habit of private worship needs to be sustained and inspired by public worship, by association and example. Protestant worship — as we have already pointed out — is primarily intended for the instruction and edification of those who are present. And, in fact, the immense majority of us stand in need of instruction in religious

and moral questions; we need to be sustained, encouraged, and strengthened in moral faithfulness and in the practice of the good. In face of the enormous development of modern printing and the facilities afforded for the circulation of every species of immoral or scarcely moral writing, of appeal to the senses and to the appetites of the animal man, I ask all serious men whether they do not believe that it is more than ever necessary to maintain and extend this educative power of public worship and to further everything that can minister to healthy and manly edification. All who are accustomed to such public worship know what deep and generous emotions it has afforded them, and what salutary lessons they have carried away.

In such matters numerous individual varieties must necessarily exist. The same means which produce a good effect on some are unpleasant to others. There is doubtless room for the introduction of greater flexibility in the public worship of the Protestant

Churches—not by multiplying the services, or by developing overmuch the exercises of a somewhat unhealthy piety, such as prayer-meetings, or meditations, in which empty verbiage seems all the more odious to those who are not hypnotised by these pious practices, as it is applied to sacred subjects—but by making use of the resources of art and literature to express religious emotions, and more especially those of music. Many Liberal Protestants consider that their worship has remained too exclusively Biblical, although they have ceased to look upon the Bible as a composition differing in essence from other books. The austerity, coldness, and—let us frankly add—the tediousness of many of these meetings for worship have in a large measure contributed to their abandonment, whilst the resources of the spiritual and æsthetic life have become more generally accessible to men of every condition.

Whatever the verdict in these matters, towards which it is good to draw attention,

but which it is not within our province to settle here, public worship remains in the eyes of Liberal Protestants, as in the view of all the other sections of Protestantism, a necessary and eminently helpful element in the religious life. But they do not consider that it ought to absorb all the religious life of the community, nor that a man's religious and moral worth should be measured by the number of his attendances at the services. For here again experience teaches us that there are men, leading highly moral and truly Christian lives, who prefer other methods of spiritual instruction and other sources of religious emotion to these meetings for official worship, and that, on the other hand, among those who may be called "pillars of the church," active piety and superior morality do not always correspond to outward devotion.

Liberal Protestantism therefore deems that it is time to modernize worship and to adapt it to the culture and temper of the age, that

the attempt should not be made to impose its traditional forms upon those who are no longer able to take any interest in them, but rather that these forms should be suited to the needs of the day. For worship possesses no magical value in itself. It has worth only in so far as it furnishes instruction, edification, religious emotions, and moral energy to those who take part in it. If you are better able to impress many of your contemporaries with a sense of the sovereignty of the Eternal by lecturing to them upon the course of the worlds through space and upon the harmonies revealed by astronomy than by expounding a portion of the Bible, you would be greatly to blame were you to neglect this powerful instrument of religious instruction, using instead a sermon on traditional lines. Indeed, the only important thing is to make men sensible of God's presence and universal activity. And if you are able, by means of studies in literature, art or ethics, nay, even by concerts or suitable performances, to nerve

for the good fight souls which remain untouched by the traditional type of preaching, you would be greatly to blame were you not to make use of such means. One of the most pressing duties of the Protestant Churches at the present day is to extend their conception of worship in this direction, and to speak in a truly modern language to the men of the twentieth century, the language of their time and civilisation, one they can understand, instead of in an empty phraseology, made up of Canaanite 'patois' and vague sentimental formulas, the worn-out remnant of the grand Biblical tradition.

Far from desiring to suppress the Churches, Liberal Protestantism aspires, on the contrary, to open out new destinies before them by recalling them to their true mission in Protestantism, which is the instruction and edification of their members, and by calling upon them to pursue this end by all the means which present-day civilisation places at their disposal. It is pre-eminently to the young that we owe this

religious instruction, this sound moral education. In our opinion there is no more important task before the Churches. Almost everywhere, in countries where an advanced state of civilisation prevails, the instruction of children is looked upon as a public service, as a function devolving upon the State; further, Liberal Protestants have everywhere been found to be the most zealous promoters and upholders of free, compulsory, and lay education, that is, of education uninfluenced by sectarian trammels and ecclesiastical dogmatism. By acting thus, they were remaining faithful to their principles. But this implied no contempt on their part for religious instruction. On the contrary; it is because they desire to see it strong, sincere, and complete that they will not tolerate a religious education which some would have uniform, official, and consequently proving either tyrannical by the imposition of a State catechism, or else superficial and purely external by the elimination of everything calculated to invest it with a definite

character. Being designed to impart to children the principles and energy necessary for their religious and moral life—in short for what is the centre of their personality—this particular religious education, the most important of all but also the one where freedom is the most sacred, belongs to the family and the religious association or Church. These have no nobler or holier task to perform; nor will they ever attach too much importance to it.

In this matter, then, Liberal Protestantism, addressing itself to parents to whom devolves the duty of choosing teachers for their children, says: "Take care lest you give your children religious instruction based upon principles entirely opposed to those which are imparted to them at school, instruction owing its power solely to the supernatural, whereas all the sciences concur in teaching them that miracles do not exist; an instruction which rests upon a body of traditions irreconcilable with the surest conclusions

of the experimental sciences and of history, an instruction which must of necessity end in a conflict with that given at school, provided only the boy or girl reflects upon what is taught. Do not lightly treat the religious and moral formation of your children; do not expose them, by your carelessness, to the terrible conflict between science and faith, in which so many minds have foundered, and which haunts everyone as a perpetual danger. Liberal Protestantism, with its purely moral conception of religion, by freeing the Gospel, properly so called, from all the traditional doctrines which have confiscated it to their own advantage, affords your children sound religious instruction, wholly leavened by the principles of the Gospel, and in strict accordance with the teaching of our modern school, an instruction which aims at producing autonomous consciences, free believers, Christians who shall be also free citizens of modern democracy. Secure them this benefit. Put them in a position to determine their own

religious and moral life, by reasoned subscription and free choice."

This is a duty incumbent upon all, even upon those parents who have failed to establish their own moral life on solid principles. We know nothing more culpable than the mode of reasoning, alas! only too current in certain circles, whereby fathers who have freed themselves from the traditional faith, Catholic or Protestant, nevertheless continue to allow their children to receive a religious instruction, the principles of which they condemn, alleging that later on, when their children are grown up, they will know how to get rid of all such useless and cumbersome religious 'impedimenta.' They would not proceed otherwise if they deliberately intended to blight the moral sense of their children.

In order that religious instruction may be given to youth, Churches are required, and religious associations needed, as well as men specially entrusted with this sacred task.

They are also required *to propagate religious and moral principles.* The word 'propaganda' now possesses an unfavourable connotation on account of the countless abuses perpetrated by the Churches based on authority. But just as that propaganda is odious which looks upon all means as equally good, seeing the end justifies the means, so also the propagation of what we consider truth and justice is the duty of each one of us. Moral truth, and above all, the moral life —as we have already said—are not propagated in the same way as scientific truth. In the case of the latter, it is enough to state, to explain, and to demonstrate it to men. The moral life, and religious faith in so far as it is an attitude of the soul, cannot be imparted by teaching alone, nor demonstrated like a theorem of geometry. They are communicated through personal influence, by example, and the splendour of their applications. Although every form of coercion and violence is odious in such matters, yet the

man of faith, the really moral man, ardently desires to make others share in the spiritual blessings which he himself enjoys. What were the value of an ideal of justice which one did not seek to apply? What were the value of a faith which did not tend to manifest itself in works?

Of a truth we see a great number of moral deeds performed outside the Churches, and we cannot congratulate ourselves too much on the extraordinary abundance of associations having moral aims; it is one of the highest claims of contemporary society upon the esteem of those which are to follow. But it is enough to glance at the statistics of these works of moral reform, as well as at those of works of charity, in order to ascertain how large is the place occupied by works of ecclesiastical origin. And if, looking further than their titles, we examine which of their members are, even outside the Churches, the most active and zealous, we still more clearly perceive what an absolutely preponderating part is played by

men and women who owe their inspiration to Christianity alone, and who reduce to practice the principles which they have gathered in their several Churches.

Social experience conclusively proves the immense work accomplished by the Churches in the moral domain and in the field of public and private charity and human solidarity. How could it be otherwise in a Christian community, where the Churches, even the most sacerdotal and dogmatic among them, have nevertheless preserved, beneath their rites and dogmas, the original precepts of the Gospel which are wholly based on love, self-sacrifice, and mutual kindness?

Liberal Protestants cannot overlook these lessons of experience. Unlike many reformers of the present day, they are unwilling to allow themselves to be so far led away by their opposition to Catholic clericalism or Protestant dogmatism, as to wish to get rid of the Churches or to lose all interest in them. If—as we are bound to confess — certain

Liberal Protestants have individually arrived at these extreme conclusions, Liberal Protestantism, as a whole, believes on the contrary in the mission of the liberalised Churches in the modern world, for worship, instruction, and education, for healthy and free moral propaganda, for the continual stimulation of works of solidarity and charity; and it believes that, far from lessening their influence for good, an ever-increasing application of their activity to moral, social, and fraternal works, irrespective of all sacerdotal and dogmatic considerations, opens up a new future, rich in blessings, both for themselves and for society in general.

The Protestant conception of the Church. Social advantages of this view.

One of the distinctive features of the Protestant conception of the Church, and we believe that we may add, without exaggeration, one of its great advantages for our modern democratic society, is that it does away with the formidable conflicts between the Church and the State, which constitute to-day, more than ever, a social calamity. For, according

to our conception, there no longer exists that terrible antithesis between the realm of God and the realm of a sinful civil society, which lasted on right through our European history as a deplorable legacy of the Jewish tradition, where the kingdom of God and the powers of this world stood confronted as two irreconcilable enemies, one of which was to destroy the other. The Catholic Church, with her excessive centralisation, her governmental hierarchy, her essential claim to be alone in possession of divine truth, and to speak and act on earth in God's name, necessarily came to identify all who did not bow before her with the enemies of God. To deny her teaching, to hinder the application of her precepts, is not merely to part company with a group of men who profess principles differing from those you yourself hold; it is to revolt against God.

It is incredible that so many of our enlightened contemporaries fail to grasp this obvious truth, but suffer themselves to be deceived

by the professions of liberalism which the Catholic Church makes when she feels menaced in her interests. Liberty and the Roman Church are as incompatible as water and fire. One only needs to open one's eyes in order to perceive that wherever the Church is able to enforce her principles, she crushes all liberty and attempts to subordinate all other authority to her own. We cannot reproach the Church for this; for when she acts otherwise, she disowns herself. We ought rather to blame those Catholics for their blindness, who believe they can reconcile liberalism and the independence of the civil power with fidelity to the Roman Church.

In the history of great institutions there is an inner logic, superior to all the artifices of the cleverest politicians. By contrasting the society of the children of God—that is to say, the Church—with the society of the adversaries of God, that is, everything in the world which does not submit to the Church, by withdrawing from the world, in order to make them

live a separate life, the so-called religious life, all who are *par excellence* her subjects, Roman Catholicism has ever acted upon civil society as a leech. She has continually drawn off a part of the most moral and religious persons which each generation produced, and consecrated them to her own exclusive interests, thus depriving lay society of their services.

It seems to me wholly unnecessary to discuss the claim of the Catholic Church to infallibility. Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century and the great development of modern historical studies, such claims can no longer be seriously discussed. The vaunted uniformity of the Catholic Church in our own day is itself no other than a delusion. It is outwardly imposing ; but experience teaches all who enter in, that, behind this purely external uniformity, lurk as many divisions, strifes, and varieties in the interpretation of symbols and the appreciation of rites, as in any other society, too often coupled, in the bargain, with that bitterness and constant recourse to under-

hand practices which are the sorry prerogative of sacristies and Jesuit schools.

Protestantism, on the contrary, in all its forms, while most emphatically repudiating this Catholic conception of the Church, far from opposing civil society, has everywhere been in close connection with it. In traditional Protestantism, however, all trace of the old antithesis between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan has not yet disappeared. It could not have been otherwise. It is true every human Church was pronounced fallible and imperfect; of course, the only true Church was the invisible Church, the members of which were known to God alone, since God alone knows the depths of the heart—an admirable distinction, the theological form of which should not render us oblivious of its grandeur, for it is nothing less than the final deliverance from the bondage of sacerdotalism. For these Protestants there nevertheless existed a divine revelation, once for all delivered, and the duty of every man was to submit to this Word of

God. The Reformers, and particularly the Calvinists, sought therefore to realise in the laws of the land all the precepts of the Bible, as well of the Old Testament as of the New. They dreamed of a regenerate civil society, renewed in accordance with the Biblical type. Whereas the Catholics aspired to subordinate the State to the Church, the civil society to the religious society, these men tried their hand at fusing the Church with the State, by the organisation of civil societies which should govern themselves in accordance with the teaching of the Bible.

To the fruitfulness of the consequences of this Protestant revolution, we can only make allusion here. It laid the foundation of political freedom and representative government. And indeed, to this very day, scarcely any but the nations schooled in these ideas have succeeded in realising at all permanently the government of the people by themselves. Wherever the Catholic ideal prevails, it perpetually mars the working of free institutions

and saps their foundation, because it fails to produce free citizens.

Nor was the ideal entertained by the Reformers any more feasible. Without entering into a lengthy discussion, it is enough to remember that it was impracticable, because it is impossible to transfer to a modern society, quite otherwise constituted, maxims of life and rules of social organisation framed to suit a little nation of antiquity or a small community of believers. Moreover, this conception was bound to break down with the belief in the infallibility of the Bible itself.

What has nevertheless survived is the perfectly clear feeling that the Church is a part of civil society, that her interests are identical with those of the secular world. What remains is a very strong attachment, on the part of the great majority, for the institution of national Churches, either allied with the State, or free from all official connection with the government of the country.

In these questions, where the principles of the moral life are not at stake, but where it is a matter of their social applications, which are inseparably bound up with many other political questions, numerous differences of opinion are naturally to be found among Liberal Protestants. Some are in favour of the complete separation of the Church and the State; others, on the contrary, retain a strong affection for their union. It is absolutely impossible to offer a general solution of this problem. Everything depends upon local circumstances, historical antecedents, and the conditions of political life.

Disestablishment, or the separation of the Churches and the State.

From a purely theoretical point of view, disestablishment, or the separation of the Churches and the State, seems to be the logical end of the religious and political evolution of the modern world; and in new countries, such as the United States of America and the Australian Commonwealth, where the Protestant spirit is, so to speak, an integral part of the moral constitution of the

people, it hardly seems to admit of a doubt that disestablishment presents very great advantages. Among the nations of the Old World, and especially in countries where the proportion of Catholics is high, it would, in all probability, prove a very dangerous thing, both for religious liberty and for political freedom, to obey the suggestions of pure theory, and surrender the guarantees which the union of the Churches and the State secures to the people as a whole. The antagonism between civil society and the Roman Church would not cease on that account, since it proceeds from the very nature of that Church; but civil society, unless it were to pass the severest possible measures against the Roman Church alone, irrespectively of the other religious associations, thus exposing itself to lapse into persecution, would remain unarmed before the formidable power of an adversary so strongly organised.

In the countries of Continental Europe it

would seem that the majority of Liberal Protestants are still, for reasons of expediency, in favour of the union of the Churches and the State, and of the type of national Churches in accordance with the lay traditions of Protestantism. This type, indeed, offers unquestionable advantages. It unites, in one and the same moral education, love of country and devotion to the religious ideal,—the two most fruitful principles of the moral life, since both urge men to stifle selfishness, the root of sin within themselves, and to subordinate the gratification of their personal passions to the higher law of self-denial and of duty, by devoting themselves to the good of the community and to the service of noble causes. Whoever has personally experienced the salutary emotions called forth by the simultaneous action of these two sentiments, the highest which it is man's lot to feel: namely, love for one's native land and fellow-countrymen, and affection for the home of one's moral education, will experience a strong reluctance in breaking with so beneficial an

National Churches, with purely religious and moral charters.

association, unless the gravest possible reasons constrain him to do so. It is not because patriotism too often degenerates into narrow and mischievous jingoism that the free believer will forget the nobleness and greatness of enlightened and lawful patriotism. But the patriot must not in turn deny the consecration given by the religious ideal to patriotism, on the plea that the religious sentiment has too often degenerated into fanaticism.

Yet, as national Churches are found allied with the State, Liberal Protestants maintain that these Churches ought to possess an exclusively religious and moral charter, which is alone compatible with the modern State. The moment an infallible authority ceases to exist, either of Pope or Council for the Catholics, or of the Word of God or Bible for the Protestants, the State has no right to decree that one particular system of theology or body of doctrine shall alone be taught in the Churches. For, were it to assume this right, it would be conferring upon itself a diploma of

infallibility which no more belongs to the State than to any other human authority.

Liberal Protestants therefore call for national Churches, in which freedom in the matter of dogma shall prevail, in which the different theological tendencies shall all enjoy full liberty, and their desire is that these dogmatic divergences may progressively diminish within the Church herself, as the inanity of all these discussions in matters which exceed the capacity of our intelligence stands out with greater clearness, as the scientific spirit develops and respect for the inevitable diversity of individual opinions spreads, in order that a brotherly cultivation of religious and moral habits and a healthy emulation in the application of the principles of the Gospel may alone flourish.

Where, then, is the unity of the Church? the supporters of the old 'doctrinaire' Church anxiously ask themselves. Can we still speak of a religious community, in which different doctrines are taught, and in which one member

professes a belief in the supernatural, and another in the place of miracle substitutes worship of universal order; if for one Jesus Christ is the Word of God, and for another the last and greatest of the prophets of Israel? Certainly not, so long as the essence of Christianity is thought to reside in the profession of a system of doctrines. But we have precisely seen that Liberal Protestants are unanimous in rejecting such an identification of the Gospel with dogmatic theology, in the name of the Gospel itself, as in the name of religious experience and of the present state of our knowledge. As a matter of fact, in the Churches which have maintained at their basis a dogmatic confession of faith, the greatest divergences arise among the members when it comes to interpreting these confessions. The intellectual unity of which they boast vanishes as soon as it is closely pressed.[1]

[1] By the same formulas, the numerous varieties of orthodox Protestants which now exist often express very different ideas. If, for example, we were to ask any so-

The unity of a Christian religious community can now only be a religious and moral unity, that is to say, adhesion to the essentially moral principles of the Gospel, with a progressive application of these principles in accordance with the conditions of the time in which we live, first in ourselves, in our own individual piety and spiritual life, then in the society of which we form a part.

Is not that enough? Let us learn to see things as they are: as a matter of fact, everywhere now men are judged solely according to their moral worth, not according to their dogmatic theology. With the exception of groups of fanatical sectarians, the vast majority of our contemporaries who are still

called orthodox Church of the present day to formulate in precise terms what it means by the word *Redemption*, there would not be a single one in which the members could succeed in coming to an agreement upon anything but hollow formulas or articles capable of receiving different interpretations,—with the exception, of course, of those which have strictly maintained the dogma of vicarious atonement. And after all, the latter alone have really a right to call themselves orthodox.

attached to the Catholic Church, or to one of the doctrinal Protestant Churches, would not think of excommunicating a good man or a benefactor of humanity on the plea that he had not partaken of the sacraments of the Church or subscribed to a confession of faith. This is a matter of experience. In theory, too, it were unbecoming in us to be more exacting than Christ Himself, and to require of members of His Church other conditions than those which He Himself required. To have our part in the love of God, in the love of justice, in the disinterested service of truth, in the love of our neighbour, in self-consecration to the divine will, is all this nothing? In truth, it is sufficient to state the question in order to solve it.

Liberal Protestants look upon the Churches, whether allied with the State or untrammelled by any bond, as associations for Christian instruction and moral education, whose mission it is to act upon the whole of society as a leaven, ever purifying, regenerating, and

uplifting the spiritual life of the people. They must not encroach on the province of the legislative power. They have nothing to do with politics. They have as their mission—and surely it is a noble one—to inculcate upon their adherents, and to seek to spread abroad, those principles and sentiments which shall suggest to the people the social reforms and individual improvements which the ever recurring ascendency of sin renders continually necessary. Are Liberal Protestants socialists or individualists? They are neither, or rather they are both, according to circumstances, the requirements of the times, and the special needs of different countries. The only thing they deem necessary is that justice should reign and liberty should flourish; that the brotherhood of the children of God should spread, and that the moral life of the individual should not be stifled; that the free and broad-minded piety of the Gospel should more and more inspire men, but not at the cost of intolerance which would radically taint it. This ideal may be

realised in various ways. Each must act, in every instance, according to his light, and above all in obedience to the voice of his own conscience.

Mission of the Liberal Churches.

Thus reduced to their function as religious and moral teachers, the Liberal Churches, whatever their denomination, may do an immense amount of good, and discharge a duty which religious associations can alone perform for society. Theirs is the noble mission of training the conscience, of stimulating individual energy, of fighting against sin in the heart of man, of bringing to the weak and to the victims of destiny the consolations and helps of the Gospel faith and charity, of continually reminding the people of the sovereign rule of the Heavenly Father and the brotherhood of man. They should be societies of mutual moral insurance against sin and the misfortunes of human life, without any claim to infallibility and without arrogance, firmly assured that in the moral and religious life persuasion

alone is effectual, and freely formed convictions alone beneficial.

They should also be as fortresses in which men may take refuge against the ever menacing attacks of sacerdotalism. Indeed, experience teaches us every day that emancipation from clericalism is only insured when a man, thus emancipated, can find safety for himself and his family by joining a religious society in which freedom is allowed. Consider what happens daily in Catholic countries; the husband becomes a free-thinker, falls away from the Church, the wife cannot submit to this absence of religion, the children must be educated. In what principles? On what tradition is such a man to graft his freedom? Let us suppose that the husband wins over to his views his wife and children, and himself undertakes the task of educating them philosophically. Do we not constantly see that by the next generation the Church has succeeded in recapturing those who were believed to have been definitely liberated? When will those liberals, who are

not on principle the enemies of every religion and of all religious ethics, come to understand that the only guarantee of final emancipation for themselves and their families lies in their joining a liberal religious society, a Liberal Church, in which they may find the spirit of progress, together with the good and permanent elements in tradition, and in which the religious needs of the human soul may be satisfied, without sacrificing any of the requirements of reason?

In order that the Liberal Churches may be enabled to fulfil this mission which is emphatically theirs, they must be seconded by all those who believe that their children need moral instruction which shall be truly modern, by all those who realise the immense advantages of an education at once religious and scientific, by all those who cannot rest content with theoretical and practical materialism. If the Churches at present in existence do not suit them, let them form others. But let them not continue to remain apart, confining them-

selves to a negative attitude towards sacerdotal or dogmatic tradition. Negations can lead to no definite results. What was the outcome of all the negations of the eighteenth century in Catholic countries? That the sacerdotal Church was rendered stronger than ever in the nineteenth century.

How is freedom to be secured and maintained in the Church, if those who are free-Christians remain indifferent to the religious life of society and shut themselves up in their individualism? And how can we secure that the indestructible social power of religion—the history of humanity everywhere witnesses to the fact—shall not be seized by the Churches based on authority and tradition, which are deeply rooted and strongly organised, if those whose moral faith is free and truly modern do not band together and take an active part in works inspired by their own spirit?

Liberal Protestantism considers that a democratic organisation of Protestant Churches lends itself, better than any other, to the constitu-

tion of Liberal religious associations. But it is not exclusive here any more than elsewhere. If, for one reason or another, free believers think they can find elsewhere better methods of securing for their principles a social influence, they should resort to them. The all-important thing is for them to feel the need of religious societies to preserve and foster their moral principles.

V

THE IDEAL OF LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM AND ITS MISSION IN MODERN SOCIETY

Liberal Protestantism is a positive religion.

According to some, Liberal Protestantism is nothing but a tissue of negations, and they are prone to accuse it of impiety. According to others, it is a mere survival of superstition, destined to disappear like every species of religion. These accusations mutually compensate and annul each other. At each fresh reform in institutions or traditional beliefs, their adherents have declared that all was lost, that religion and piety were at an end, and that, under pretence of reforming, the innovators succeeded in completely destroying the moral life of humanity. And often in the past the revolutionists have upbraided the reformers for timidity or inconsistency, because they claimed to preserve all that was good in the old order, instead of overthrowing

everything by making a clean sweep of every species of tradition. The reception given to Liberal Protestantism by hardened conservatives, as well as by the enemies of all religion, is perfectly natural.

Yes, undoubtedly, Liberal Protestantism rejects a considerable number of traditional doctrines, Catholic and Protestant. Every affirmation implies a negation. Those Protestants who are termed orthodox are deniers in the eyes of Catholics; the Christians were constantly accused by the Pagans of antiquity of being deniers and atheists, because they refused to worship the accredited gods. Every reform necessarily presents itself at first in its negative aspect. In order to reconstruct, indeed in order to repair, you must begin by pulling down that part of the building which needs to be replaced. But nothing could be more inexact than to identify Liberal Protestantism with a mass of negations. It is, on the contrary, very positive in its affirmations. We believe we have shown this with sufficient

clearness to render any fresh allusion to the point superfluous. It is impossible for any fruitful teaching to remain merely negative. Negation is sterile. In particular, in the realm of the religious and moral life, positive affirmations alone can furnish those energies without which there is no life. In order that a tree may yield savoury fruit, you must prune it, yet it is not the pruning that makes the tree bud and the fruit ripen, but the sap.

Nor is it more correct to accuse Liberal Protestantism of being a survival of old superstitions. You may reject its principles, if you deem them faulty, but do not place it in the same category with the religions of the past based on authority. For it appeals to reason, conscience, and experience only, that is to say, to those very instruments used in free scientific research and to the only tests of truth which the unfettered minds of modern men can accept. Of course, it does not claim to have definitely and completely discovered truth, nor is it foolish enough to denounce

the infallibilities of yore, in order to supersede them by its own. It appeals to free inquiry, expects nothing save from free persuasion, and firmly trusts that the future will further and bring to perfection the religious and moral work for which it labours.

It aims at reconciling tradition and progress.

The ambition of Liberal Protestantism, the mission which it aspires to fulfil in present-day society, is precisely to conciliate tradition and progress, to preserve what is good and lasting in the religious experience of the past, by freeing it from the antiquated and henceforth unacceptable forms which endanger its usefulness to the men of to-day, and to combine it with the spiritual culture of our time, with the needs and experiences of the present day, and with the legitimate demands of the future. The proportion of each is difficult to determine; much naturally depends upon the circumstances, surroundings, and antecedents. What seems to one person extravagant appears meagre to another. The task

of Liberal Protestantism is thus simply to continue the work of reformation in modern society, neither in a conservative nor in a revolutionary spirit, but progressively and by evolution. It embodies the ever active reforming principle, now rising up against sacerdotal despotism, now against magical and sacramental religion, at one time challenging the bondage of dogma or the formalism of the Pharisee, at another condemning sin in the individual or injustice in society, according as the need of reform is more strongly felt in one or other of these directions.

Religion wrongly connected, both by conservatives and by revolutionists, with the existence of an external religious authority and with the supernatural.

Thus, for some we reform too much, while for others we are neither logical enough nor courageous enough to apply our principles all along the line. On the right we are told: under pretence of reforming Christianity and of adapting religion to the needs of the modern spirit, it is Christianity and religion itself that you are overthrowing, so that you have nothing left. By dint of sharpening the knife

you have come to wear away the blade. On the left we are told: you cannot put an end to the errors and abuses which you justly condemn without making an end of religion. The latter merely represents a transitory stage in the evolution of the human mind. To the era of religion must succeed the era of science. There is no longer any room for religion in the society of the future.

The statement of the religious and moral tenets of Liberal Protestantism which we have given above is, in our mind, sufficient to justify it before the tribunal of public opinion. The profoundly religious character of its moral conception of the Gospel is beyond dispute, and the moral value of such teaching, which satisfies the highest aspirations of the modern conscience, cannot be called into question.

It is nevertheless expedient for us to examine these objections more closely, in order to gain a more accurate idea of the relation of Liberal Protestantism to the other spiritual

tendencies of present-day society, and to grasp more clearly the nature of the work which lies before it.

When we attentively examine the reproaches levelled against it by irreligious people as well as by traditionalists, we soon recognise that they proceed from the same premises, from the same traditional conception of religion, still held by the latter, but rejected by the former. In addition to particular doctrines, there are two essential principles which, in the view of both, so to speak, constitute religion, so that if they are taken away religion itself disappears: on the one hand, the existence of a *religious authority external to man*, having the right and the power to dictate his belief and the rules of his conduct; on the other, belief in the *supernatural*. They imagine that without an external authority, and a belief in the supernatural, religion is impossible: that is why—so Protestant and Catholic conservatives assert—we must at all costs maintain external authority and the super-

natural; that is why, answer the adversaries of all religion, we must destroy religion, since we no longer admit any arbitrary authority, or believe in the supernatural.

Liberal Protestantism opposes with all its might this fatal conception of religion, which justifies at once the fears of the traditionalists and the indignation of the revolutionists. Together with all true free-thinkers, it rejects every religious authority external to man, whether of the Church, as Catholics maintain, or of the whole Bible, as orthodox Protestants assert, or of such and such a part of the Bible, as semi-orthodox Christians affirm, who fail to see that by making a choice in accordance with their own judgment, they are substituting their own authority for that of the Bible. Liberal Protestantism, as we have seen, founds both religion and ethics solely upon the inner authority of conscience, reason, and experience. With science, it rejects the supernatural in order to combine the religious sentiment with the modern conception of universal order.

And it considers that its mission is to acquaint the men of our day with this modern conception of religion, by dispelling the fatal error that religion is synonymous with external authority and the supernatural, and by propagating the sense of a religion which an educated man may accept, without entailing a divorce between all his intellectual convictions and his faith.

The very idea of a religious authority, *external* to man, is based on a childish psychology. A little thought will suffice to convince us that it is always and everywhere a fallacy. An authority only exists for us in the measure in which we recognise it as such, either unconsciously and without our understanding the motives that prompt us, or through fear and well-advised interest, or by virtue of an act of conscious reasoning. After all, it is always the adhesion of our mind and of our will which alone gives it weight. If I yield obedience to the pope or to a council, if I admit their right to determine what I am to

believe or what motives shall guide my life, it is because *I believe* in their infallibility. If I accept with my eyes shut the teaching of any Bible, it is because *I believe* that God is speaking to me in that Bible. The ultimate cause of my conduct is always in myself. It cannot be otherwise. To argue that the overthrow of time-honoured external authorities in religion is tantamount to the overthrow of religion itself is entirely to misconstrue the facts furnished by psychological observation. Because I refuse to bow before any traditional authority, being unable to accept it any longer, it in no way follows that I am unwilling to benefit spiritually by other examples and teaching, which I am able to accept, on the contrary, with all my soul.

The identification of religion with the supernatural is likewise indefensible. It is not our intention here, any more than in the preceding pages, to engage in theological discussions as to God's method of action in the universe. It is the idlest task possible

to undertake to discuss matters about which we are ignorant, which we can never know, because they greatly exceed the range of our intelligence, and because we do not possess the data of the problem. To determine what God can or can not do is about as reasonable as if a child of two claimed to decide what problems a mathematician of genius could solve. Here, as elsewhere, we must take our stand on experience, and keep to facts which we can know and which everyone can verify.

If the traditional religions have all been closely associated with a belief in the supernatural, it is for the very simple reason that the scientific notion of natural order did not exist when they were formed. The antithesis between the natural and the supernatural is quite a modern one. It only dates from the birth of the natural sciences and the scientific method of critical observation and experimentation. Until then, throughout the world, in antiquity, during the Middle Ages, and till the eighteenth century, miracles were con-

sidered the natural mode of God's activity in the world.

Protestantism, from the outset, reduced their number, not on scientific but on religious grounds, by refusing to admit any other miracles than those of the Bible. It was inevitable that miracles should be expelled from this their last refuge, as the scientific conception of natural order spread and the history of the Biblical writings gave men a better insight into the conditions under which they had been composed. The claim to admit none but the miracles of the Bible was, to say the least, a strange one, seeing that many other narratives of miracles infinitely better attested might be found elsewhere. When Saint Bernard tells us of the miracles he himself used to perform, and when we can go and see with our own eyes miracles at Lourdes, it is, at all events, singular to declare that we do not believe in them, but that in return we believe in the miracles of the Bible, performed two or three thousand years ago,

and none of which is narrated to us by an eye-witness.

The conflict between the School and the Church.

The truth is that to-day belief in miracles is only a survival of the erroneous notions which people entertained about nature, prior to the results of modern science. Outside religious tradition, still thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the past, miracles are now no longer credited anywhere. Among Protestants, even the most ardent defenders of the supernatural no longer allow that miracles play any part whatever in their own life[1]; and

[1] In support of the supernatural, some invoke God's intervention in answer to prayer, but their contention is based upon a false notion of prayer. In practice, with the exception of a very small number of fanatics, the traditionalists of every school resort to the means furnished by experience and science in order to ward off the dangers which menace them or to obtain the gratification of their wants. They do not rely upon miracle. In theory, the conception of magical prayer, considered as a means of provoking miracles, is not only contrary to experience and observation, it is, further, scarcely reverent, and opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. True Christian prayer, of which the Lord's Prayer is the pattern, and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, at the most solemn moment in His life,

when it comes to explaining the miracles of the past, they invoke the action of laws as yet unknown which are supposed to have modified the course of the laws we at present know; that is to say, in order to save the fact they deny the principle. In reality, whenever we are able to closely scrutinise a supposed miracle, of ancient or recent times, we either

the most striking example, is: "Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The disciple of Christ makes his confession to his Heavenly Father in pious solitude, craves pardon for his sins, glorifies Him, and looks to God for strength to submit to the divine will. He is not irreverent enough to desire to substitute his own will for God's will, nor to move God to act counter to providential order. All the great Christians of the past, such as Paul, Augustine, Luther, conscious of the absolute sovereignty of God and of man's dependence upon God, have been led to proclaim, in theory, the deep intuition which Jesus had drawn from His piety. Experience — daily renewed by millions of human beings — teaches us that meditation and prayer impart to man fresh moral energy, a more intense spiritual life, consolation, hope, rest for the soul, and other spiritual benefits. But this spiritual value of prayer, which remains an undeniable fact whatever explanation we may give of it, in no way implies supernatural intervention on the part of God, providing at every turn for the need of the moment. It is, on the contrary, a constant phenomenon in the moral realm.

perceive that it is legendary, or else, if the fact is true, we discover that it may be reduced to the play of natural laws.

Where can we find to-day, outside places of worship, schools in which miracles are still taught? nay more, in which the possibility of miracles is still admitted? We have, then, in these latter days, come to the following deplorable pass, namely, that in the majority of our Churches the clergy continue to teach the faithful, and more particularly the children, that they are to build their moral life and the assurance of their eternal salvation on the belief in a series of miraculous events; whereas, in every other place, and especially in the schools which these same children attend, they are taught that there is no such thing as a miracle, that the universe is governed by laws, and that modern science says the very opposite to what the Churches are teaching as sacred truth. Such a state of things is truly terrible. One may well enquire how the moral life of the new generation can subsist under such con-

ditions, and no one can any longer be surprised that the influence exerted by religion upon modern democracies wanes as instruction and the habit of reflecting become more general.

Error of those who think they can substitute science for religion in moral education.

Since the School and the Church, science and religion, cannot agree, we will abolish the Church and religion, say a growing number of our contemporaries, especially in Catholic countries where the conflict is most keen. How many, too, are there who, without publicly professing such an intention, and, above all, without wishing to take religion from those who are attached to it, have in practice crushed all religion out of their own lives?

Their very reserve is instructive. Many of these people more or less clearly feel that the suppression of religion leaves a void in the spiritual life. They are no longer able to accept the ideas and religious practices which prevail in their midst, and which are generally the only ones they are acquainted with. If

they were to continue outwardly to profess them, they would be hypocrites—of all things in the world the most repugnant. But they cannot help, at times, envying the spiritual serenity of those who possess strong religious convictions; they would scruple to unsettle them, and frequently they have a more or less clear intuition that a society without any religion, supposing even that it could subsist, would be diminished and so to speak mutilated.

Historical experience, in fact, enables us to affirm that, if at all times a greater or less number of individuals have been found with no religious life, no society has yet existed without any religion at all; indeed, far from this being the case, even during the periods when the old religions, resting upon venerable traditions, were slowly sinking beneath the indifference of their nominal adherents, the religious needs of the human soul were making themselves felt in unsuspected ways, and the religious germination of the future was taking place, often with more force than at the time

when the abundant harvest of a triumphant religion covered the earth.

The teaching of history further enables us to affirm that men have never yet succeeded in overthrowing religious institutions or beliefs, firmly established in a community, whatever may have been the faults of their representatives or the error of their doctrines, without replacing them by other institutions or principles, calculated to satisfy the religious needs of the human soul. The irreligious free-thinkers of our day who strive to make an end of the Church, with her irrational traditions, her superstitious practices, and her despotism so intolerable to the modern mind, by destroying all religion and by eliminating the very name of God from the lessons and books designed for children, are victims of a strange delusion! Alas! we have already witnessed the fact, and shall again: the very men who naïvely vote to-day for the suppression of God will to-morrow go once more to Mass; and perhaps many of them still continue to intrust

the moral education of their children to these same priests, or to these same representatives of orthodox tradition, whose suppression they are for ever decreeing.

Indeed, they must wholly have failed to grasp the true nature of religion and its inner essence, who imagine that it is possible to destroy it. Religion occupies the centre of our spiritual life, in those even who revolt against the traditional doctrines in favour of which the Church has attempted to confiscate it. It lies at the root of all ethical questions. For—we have need to recall here, what we have already stated—religion is the intimate consciousness of the link which binds us to the universe. In proportion as we feel this relation in one way or in another, our conception of the meaning of life will be different. The one thing we cannot do is to suppress this relation between the universe and ourselves. Unless we live a purely vegetative or animal life, obeying, without the slightest thought or feeling of our responsibility, the impulses of our senses and the

appetites of our lower nature, we cannot help having some notion, however vague, of the aim we are to pursue in life, of life's meaning and object, of the place we occupy in the universe, and of the duties entailed upon us.

Science cannot satisfy the religious needs of our being, because the realm in which they find satisfaction is not within its competency. Those irreligious free-thinkers who wish to substitute science for religion in the moral education of man are guilty of the same confusion as the upholders of religious tradition when they speak of the bankruptcy of science. They fail to appreciate the real nature of the science they are exalting or disparaging. Science is simply the methodical knowledge of facts and events, in a word, of phenomena. It studies all that is perceived by our senses ; it compares, associates, and co-ordinates our perceptions ; it reduces them to general categories, deducing rules and laws, the correctness of which it verifies by experience, and which it

afterwards applies to the rational working of the forces of nature.

But science of itself has no moral character, as we have already seen. It simply furnishes materials for our judgment, and perfected instruments for our activity. Undoubtedly it contributes towards the moral life, to which it lends valuable assistance; it teaches us better to know ourselves and better to understand this immense and mysterious universe in which we live. For this reason we must not only give it exclusive pre-eminence in our instruction, but we must also grant it first-rank influence in our moral education. But the moral judgment which each of us forms of the duties entailed by such knowledge of himself and of the world around him, the moral determination of his relation to the world which follows therefrom and which will decide the direction of his activity, are not and cannot be within the province of science. For science does not and cannot impart vital energy, what we may call the dynamic ele-

ment in the spiritual life—that is to say, what precisely constitutes the active agent of our moral life.

We are here at the very centre of the spiritual life, in the inner sanctuary of our being, where science has nothing more to tell us. Even supposing it to be able, by patient analysis, to discern and dissect all the springs of the psychical organism at work in us, it would only be explaining the mere mechanism, it would not be giving us the principle. Science will certainly succeed, nay, it has already practically succeeded, in reproducing all the phases in the formation of any given living being and all the chemical elements which compose its manifold combinations. But science cannot endow this being with life, any more than it can tell us what constitutes life. Science can analyse all the physical and chemical operations which together insure the transmission of a telegraphic despatch. But all the physics and chemistry in the world will not give us the meaning of the despatch;

though, for the decision of our minds, the meaning of the despatch is alone of importance.

Science of itself is neither religious nor anti-religious. There are great scientists who are profoundly religious, and fools who are not religious at all. There is no unfairness or systematic disparagement in saying that those who most frequently proclaim science the irreconcilable enemy of religion are generally men whose scientific culture is somewhat superficial. And it is not doubtful that in making an idol of a power which demands to be honoured in serious contemplation and self-renunciation, they are misrepresenting it every whit as much as the bigots are lowering the Deity, by invoking Him for the service of their own passions and personal enmities.

The amphibians of the spiritual life.

What then shall we do? What solution shall we fix upon? How shall we escape from this terrible divorce of the traditional Church and the School, of our religious edu-

cation still saturated through and through with the notions of the past and our instruction thoroughly permeated by modern scientific conceptions which cannot be reconciled with those of the past? We require a religion, and yet we cannot abjure science.

There is a so-called solution embraced by a great number of our contemporaries, doubtless without enthusiasm, but through resignation or weariness, for lack of a better one, and because, after all, it is by far the most convenient. Just as in ill-assorted unions, where the husband and wife cannot succeed in agreeing, and yet are unwilling to divorce on account of the disadvantages which such a course would entail to the family interests or the education of the children, the married couple resign themselves to a common life, under the same roof, side by side, but as completely separated as if at opposite poles, and without any moral fellowship subsisting between them, so many men in our day consent to divide their spiritual life into two parts, one

for religion, the other for scientific culture, without in the slightest degree attempting to harmonise them. They mark off, so to speak, two compartments in their brain, separated by a water-tight partition; in the one, they believe in the supernatural, in the other they deny it; in the one, they profess to subordinate their reason to the authority of an infallible spiritual director, either the Pope or the Bible; in the other, their rule is never to accept anything their reason condemns, and never to do anything their conscience reproves. Is the question one of religion? the first comes into play. Is any other subject under consideration? then the other acts. With some this dual spiritual life is the result of a decision coolly arrived at, after mature thought; it is a product of scepticism or of the exigencies of life. With the majority it is merely the result of innate laziness of the mind.

Liberal Protestantism rejects this solution with all its strength. And it does more than reject it: it condemns it as immoral and

impious. An honest and sincere atheist is a thousand times better than one of these double-minded believers, one of these amphibians of the spiritual life, who is always denying on the one hand what he affirms on the other. We can, with difficulty, understand how a sincere and loyal man can agree to what is after all, according to circumstances, nothing but cowardice or duplicity; and still less can we explain how men of such a calibre can dare to upbraid liberal Christians, or even revolutionists, for their endeavours, which have the merit of being sincere, to put an end to so deplorable and inconsistent a state of things. In our eyes there are no worse blasphemers of religion than these Sadducees, who, from age to age, nail to the pillory whoever makes sincerity his supreme aim.

The mission of Liberal Protestantism is to propagate a religion in harmony with the teaching of the School.

Liberal Protestants are of opinion that there is another solution to the problem which so painfully agitates modern society. They consider it their duty to ceaselessly denounce

the fatal confusion of religion with a body of doctrines, practices, and rites, which reason and conscience are no longer able to accept; to inform the men of our day of the results arrived at by religious science, by a serious and reverent, yet absolutely free, study of the origin and evolution of Christianity, by the history of the religions of the world; to appeal to men's religious and moral experience in order to teach them that religion is independent of the forms it has assumed in the past, that it does not perish with the dogmas which are only temporary expressions of it, suited to the civilisation of the past, nor with the rites which are only ephemeral and ever modifiable and perfectible applications of it; to lead men to see the need of religion in the individual and social life, and to prove to them that religion is only fruitful when it is sincere and when it pervades the whole moral life.

The mission of modern Liberal Protestantism is to speak to the men of every class, race, and creed, to Catholics by birth as well as to

Protestants and Jews, to all those who are troubled because of the gulf which separates their inherited religious beliefs from their modern intellectual convictions, and to set before them a religion acceptable to their reason, confirmed by experience, answering to the needs of the conscience and heart in highly-cultured communities; a religion capable of endowing them with the moral and emotional energies which are the necessary agents of the spiritual life; a religion which retains what is best, most powerful, and beneficial in the age-long experience of the human race, without requiring any mutilation of the intellect, and without condemning its followers to moral double-mindedness; a religion at once the child of tradition, since it adheres to the Gospel of Christ, and the inspirer of unceasing progress, because it does not look upon this Gospel as a revelation sealed once for all, but as a life-giving power, the principle of an organic evolution, destined to unfold itself more and more, to branch out

and expand, ever adapting itself to the fresh conditions and needs of civilisation; a religion which shall possess an internal authority, and act as the leaven of individual regeneration, and which shall thus prove the ever active agent of social regeneration, seeing it aims at the establishment of God's reign upon earth, through the triumph of justice over iniquity, of goodness over selfishness, of spiritual liberty over the chains of sin in the individual and in society; a religion, in a word, of vigorous and healthy-minded piety, bringing quietness to man, peace to the soul, resignation and consolation in the inevitable sorrows of our earthly life and the hope of everlasting life, that necessary crowning of our miserable existence here below.[1]

With Christ, Liberal Protestantism sums up

This religion consists in loving God in man and man in God.

[1] Although the plan of these studies has not admitted of a special paragraph being devoted to this subject, it is important to forestall any misunderstanding by stating here that faith in the eternal destiny of man is a cardinal element in Liberal Protestantism. But while cherishing

this religion in the double commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and thy neighbour as thyself." And with Christ it holds that these two commandments are one: to love God in man and man in God. For love of God manifests itself not only in passive submission to the divine order which is the law of the universe, but also and especially in active submission to the divine order which is the moral law, that is to say, in the joyful and complete fulfilment of all our obligations towards our neighbours, in the family,

the Christian and practically universal hope of life after death, and remaining convinced that, without a future life, existence here below were nothing but a sinister comedy, lacking purpose and sanction; and while looking upon eternal life as the necessary crowning of our earthly existence, since the latter would no longer possess any moral character if at death all were ended for us, Liberal Protestantism thinks that it behoves us to be reserved when speaking of immortality, not attempting to discourse upon a matter which, from its very nature, lies beyond all positive comprehension on our part, but resting content with stating the principle of conformity with the law of nature that nothing is lost or destroyed, without venturing to determine the modes of its application.

in the state, in all our social relations, and in humanity.

Unfortunately, men have constantly been inclined to separate the two, to the point of neglecting one for the sake of the other. How many Christians, and not the least disinterested among them, have so far concentrated all their religious life and devotion upon the adoration of God, the service of God, and communion with God, that they have lost sight of their neighbour, so that their very piety has drawn them away from mankind! How many of our contemporaries, on the other hand, are so engrossed by love of their neighbour and by the feeling of the solidarity of the race, that they are no longer capable of adoring God and of recognising that love towards God is the only really genuine foundation of love towards humanity!

The religion of humanity is only one half, which does not suffice to sustain the moral life.

This religion of humanity, which is the refuge to-day of many noble minds amid the religious confusion of our time, is more Christian than many of its adherents think.

Is it not purely and simply the realisation in practice of the commandment: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself? But it is only an incomplete Christianity, and insufficient of itself, because it ignores the other side of the moral life, and thus mutilates it. It is perfectly right to appeal to solidarity; we have dwelt at sufficient length upon its supreme importance in the moral life of the individual and of society. But those who wish to found our entire moral life upon the feeling of our duty towards humanity forget that this duty in nowise constitutes a moral obligation. We owe everything to the labour of previous generations, and we are fixed into our present social solidarity in its ever increasing complexity. Doubtless; yet the previous generations did not labour on our behalf; and in our own day every individual who performs his social duties is not labouring to do me a service, but to satisfy his own wants. With regard to our contemporaries, solidarity simply amounts to division of labour. With

regard to the past we need feel no gratitude. We only benefit by the labours of past generations from the fact, independent of their will, that in the universal chain of cause and effect we were born in this portion of space and time. Men around us are our equals; we are indebted to them as they to us. Between them and us there is simply a reciprocity of service. This basis alone is insufficient to insure our moral life.

It only finds a stable grounding in the feeling of our absolute dependence upon the universal order. To it we owe everything; it owes us nothing. There lies the foundation of religion and ethics, indissolubly associated in the depths of the human soul; that is the principle of moral obligation, the source of energy, the power of salutary resignation, and joyful and confident activity. The noblest and strongest races have been those which have most deeply experienced this inner assurance. With the Gospel we must *love God in man and man in God.*

Liberal Christianity is the true moral Catholicity of the future.

It is well to close with these words. They sum up, better than any others, the mind and faith of Liberal Protestantism. To those who ask for a definition, even in the case of moral principles which are essentially spirit and life, and which do not admit of being imprisoned in a formula; to those who, little acquainted with theological or religious discussions, desire a short and simple text that shall condense our conception of religion and ethics; to those who, still faithful to ancient custom, demand of everyone a confession of faith, we have nothing else to answer. The profession of faith of Liberal Protestantism — or of Liberal Christianity, for these two names are interchangeable— is wholly summed up in the single precept: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and thy neighbour as thyself.*

Liberal Protestants are conscious of being thus at the very heart of primitive and true Christianity, in deep and living spiritual communion with Christ, since Jesus Himself summed up the law and the prophets, that is

to say, the rule of life and the principle of moral inspiration, in this supreme command. They are also conscious of being in spiritual communion with the masters of the religious and moral life in the past and with the army of those who passed, humble and unknown, in the world, but who, beneath the doctrines and rites of their day, penetrated to the inner sanctuary of the Gospel; with those who sincerely loved God as they knew Him, the divine life as they understood it, and humanity as it was presented to them under the conditions of their time. Their dogmas, metaphysical doctrines, rites, sacraments, and ecclesiastical regulations were different; the dust of history is formed from all the fragments of the institutions and theologies which so deeply divided them. They were all at one in their profession of the moral Gospel. This is the supreme unity which links together, through time and space, all pure and holy souls, all those who have striven against evil and have aspired to lead a better life.

Liberal Protestants are firmly persuaded that even at the present time, in our society so perplexed by the religious problem, in the most widely differing ecclesiastical confessions and under the greatest variety of names; among Catholics who remain religious, though unable any longer to believe and worship with their Church, among Protestants who are still officially adherents of traditional dogmatic confessions, but who only render a silent homage to dogma; among free-thinkers who have severed all connection with traditional Churches, but who are painfully conscious, for themselves as well as for society, of the lack of a satisfactory religious education: a large proportion of their brethren may be found who at heart are in sympathy with them, and with whom they can enter into spiritual communion. The number of ecclesiastical communities over which flies the standard of Liberal Protestantism is small. The diocese in which flourishes the spirit of Liberal Protestantism or Liberal Christianity is as wide as the world.

How do preachers and moralists act whenever it is a question of calling to the religious life the masses of the people now alienated from religion? Do they teach them the dogmas of the Councils, the miracles of the Bible, or the necessity of being saved through the sacraments? No; they set before them the purely moral Gospel, as it is taught by Liberal Christianity, the Gospel of Jesus, not the Gospel of Paul or of John, of Calvin or of Bossuet. Even the missionaries of the traditional Churches thus do homage to the modern conception of Christianity by recognising that it alone is capable of influencing the minds of those who are unconnected with any traditional Church. How many among the so-called orthodox clergy of to-day are broadening into liberalism!

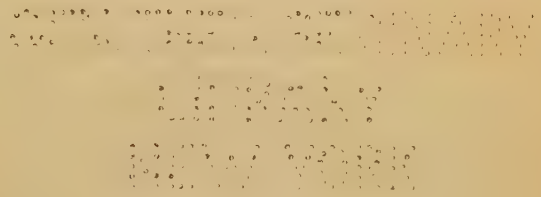
Let believers have the courage frankly to confess that they have ceased to be orthodox, that they are no longer dogmatic Catholics or Protestants. Sincerity and loyalty demand this. Let them not continue to render a

merely outward homage to institutions and ideas from which they are alienated! Let them have the courage to educate those around them, and the wisdom to group themselves together in liberal religious associations, which can alone insure, for them and theirs, final deliverance.

Let free-thinkers have the courage, equally needful, not to stand aloof in a purely negative attitude towards religious societies. Let them feel the necessity of seeing that their children receive an education at once religious and modern. Let them realise more clearly that it is their duty to solve the religious problem for themselves and for the sake of those whom they have the duty to instruct. What the former lack is the courage to confess their liberalism. What the latter need is the courage to exhibit the religious character of their conception of life.

Liberal Protestantism is confident in the future. It sees its ideas and principles spreading throughout the traditional Protestant

Churches, now and again even in the Catholic Churches. It believes in the reconciliation of a portion of the socialist or radical democracy of our day with a religion definitively emancipated from the dogmatic or sacramental notions of the past. And with firm hope it looks to a future when the dogmas, sacraments, and rites which have constantly divided men will have disappeared from the religious community, and when the purely moral religion of love towards God and our fellow-man will be that blessed spiritual unity among all men of good-will, in their struggle against sin, selfishness, and injustice, which is the true moral Catholicity of humanity.



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